

Performing Faith: Dance, Identity and Religion in Hindu Communities in Leicester and London

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ABSTRACT

This thesis concentrates on Gujarati groups in Leicester and Tamil Hindus in greater London, examining the place of dance in their religious worship using an ethnographic methodology to determine whether these practices are ‘performances of faith’.

The thesis looks briefly at the history of South Asian dance in Britain, setting it in the context of funding issues, notions of tradition and innovation, and the legacy of the original Indian temple dancers, the *devadasis*. Elements of *devadasi* practice that are being reintroduced into contemporary Bharatanatyam performance to undergird religious sentiments are analysed and discussed. These factors and both fieldwork chapters are set in a theoretical framework that considers concepts of cultural, religious and ethnic identity and the relevance of dance practices in the formation of such identities. The presentation of data in these chapters reveals how Gujarati *Raas* and *Garba* movement forms at the Hindu religious festival of *Navratri* create a locus for the transmission of particular Gujarati religious and social identities, and how the teaching and performance of the classical dance form of Bharatanatyam maintains a specific Tamil identity in the Tamil temples and festivals. Common to many diasporic milieux, the cultural practices of these two Hindu communities, in particular dance expression, are prized as carriers of ethnic and religious identity.

Further chapters of the thesis examine perceptions of religiosity related to the dancing body in the light of Hindu religious worship, and within this frame, consider aspects of ritual purity and impurity and factors of gender. The influence of Bollywood film dance on traditional dance practices is interrogated and discussed in detail in the context of global and local forces that impact significantly on diasporic communities, showing how such influences are major

factors in the creation of new forms and identities, particularly for the younger generations.

The work documents and analyses the rich vein of UK Hindu community dance practices, providing evidence as to how and why dance is an integral aspect in the performance of faith. It foregrounds areas that have previously been marginalised in dance academia and attempts to redress the alterity of the colonialist legacy, revealing how the present situation of South Asian community dance is one which is evolving, changing and growing in significance.

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Part One: Setting the Scene and Entering the Dance

INTRODUCTION

Nine o'clock in the evening - a hot, crowded hall in north-west London. The senses are assaulted by the blaze of colour and sound on entering the space and the extraordinary vision that meets the eyes. About three hundred women are filling the large arena, moving almost as one, to the beat of the music. They progress in concentric circles, anti-clockwise around a central shrine with rhythmical steps, hands moving naturally to clap on the three dominant beats of the pulse, as if they have moved forever in this way. Their traditional Gujarati outfits are a blaze of differing colours: full skirts to the ground and long shawls flowing as they move, and a glint of jewellery as the bodies pass by. Young and old join in this joyous celebration to the Hindu goddess, *Devi*.

Author's fieldnotes, London 25.10.01

i. Introductory research questions

This brief description of one of the nine nights of the autumn Hindu religious festival *Navratri*, a pan-Indian festival in praise of the feminine power of the divine, provokes certain questions about the religious worship and codified movement systems of a society. How does a community draw upon dance in its expression of religious faith? (The community portrayed here, celebrating with folk dance and music, are part of the Gujarati community in London, who originate from the state of Gujarat in north-west India). What are the perceptions of the place of dance in religious practice? How may dance practices transmit, represent or rework cultural categories of identity? Are such festival events tools for the transmission of cultural and religious beliefs and values? Are they in fact, 'performances of faith'? The questions that arise in response to observation of such occasions form the main focus of this research, and underpin an analysis of attitudes and beliefs that govern contemporary religious practice and its expression through dance and movement in Hindu communities in the United Kingdom (UK).

ii. Frames of perception

The focal point of this study is the South Asian dance forms that are not necessarily in the public eye and funded by the public purse, but practices which locate themselves within Hindu temple worship and Hindu religious festivals in the UK, and are attended by the Hindu community. The dance practices found at these events include both classical and folk dance styles and appear to be at present examples of ‘under-investigated genres and cultural practices’ (Buckland 1999a:3), indicating the significance of this current study within the wider field of dance research in Britain. In particular, my research examines firstly the dances performed by the predominately Gujarati Hindu population at Hindu festival occasions in the city of Leicester, situated in the East Midlands of the UK, and secondly, the mainly Sri Lankan Tamil groups settled in Greater London and their movement forms related to temple worship. The investigation seeks additionally to discover whether a reverse trend is revealed - that of a move back into religious practices, rather than solely secular performance - or to discover whether this is a phenomenon that has always existed. In this context, the relationship to the legacy of the original Indian temple dancers (*devadasis*)¹ is interrogated in Chapters One and Six. The enquiry also questions the place and perception of Hindu religious dance practices amongst the Hindu communities, and the values the communities themselves invest in such expression. It is envisaged that this particular research will contribute to a developing body of knowledge of Hindu community dance practices, mapping as it does, a field that is as yet, in the main, un-charted and un-represented² and which forms a significant arena of community dance within the UK.

The term ‘South Asian dance’ was brought into use in the UK in the 1980s to supersede the existing terminology ‘Asian dance’ and ‘Indian dance’, and was designed to include dance traditions from the whole of the sub continent, regardless of political subdivisions. But the label is a problematic one. In North America, it refers to the geographical region of the Pacific Rim and includes Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines and Malaysia, and to British Asian dancers it can appear somewhat reductive. American academic and performer Uttara Asha Coorlawala wrote that ‘from my perspective, the phrase “South Asian Dance” is repeatedly embedded within a discourse of pain and

anger, a discourse that interrogates whiteness, and negotiates a place for itself in a white driven power structure' (2002:32). Indeed, the Arts Council Review on South Asian Dance in England admits that some artists 'feel completely alienated by the term "South Asian Dance", asserting that "Indian Dance or Classical Indian Dance" is a more appropriate term for their work' and goes on to state that in the 'development of the field, dissonance is also present' (Jarrett-Macauley 1997:13-14). The *ADiTi* dance teacher's handbook explains that, 'In Britain, the term South Asian dance embraces the classical, folk, creative, contemporary and other popular dance styles and genres originating from the countries of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka' (Gordziejko 1996:6).³

As author of this ethnography, I enter the field with a background of dance practice in both western and South Asian styles – in my youth a full training in ballet, contemporary dance and European/British folk dance, followed by the study of two South Asian (Indian) classical styles of dance, Bharatanatyam and Kathak⁴, and many years of dance teaching. My particular interest in these latter forms has been supported by a sincere and enduring attraction to Hindu philosophic thought which I have pursued over many years along with the study of the Sanskrit language. A further undertaking of an MA in Dance Studies at the University of Surrey furnished me with a love of dance anthropology and a training in dance ethnography. All these threads are woven together in this current research where I examine the dance practices of the Hindu community embedded in a religious context and explore too the ethnographic process through which these issues are investigated.

A comprehensive review of the relevant literature related to South Asian dance is presented in Chapter One, but it is important to note here that other significant work investigating various aspects of South Asian dance is being undertaken currently in Britain, North America and India. Although not directly related to the issues being investigated in this research, specific dance scholars are cited here as they have played an extensive role in the development of understanding of South Asian dance forms, and continue to do so. Their work has replaced the limited and unquestioning histories previously available and has relocated the debate away from the colonialist, nationalistic

and monolithic views of Asia and its expressive culture. In the UK, academics such as Gheerawo (1997), Grau (1997, 2001, 2002), and Iyer (1997a, 1997b); in Europe, Kersenboom (1987, 1991, 1995); in North America, Allen (1997), Chakravorty (1998, 2001), Coorlawala (1992, 2002, 2004), Erdman (1987, 1996), Gaston (1991, 1996), Meduri (1996, 2001), O'Shea (1998, 2001, 2003) and Shah (1998); and in India, Srinivasan (1983, 1985, 1988, 1998a), Subrahmanyam (1998, 2001) and Vatsyayan (1974, 1987, 1989), have all contributed to furthering the appreciation of dance in the complexity of the broad spectrum of Indian aesthetics. It is evident, however, from this review that no work of an ethnographic nature enquiring into South Asian dance practices in Britain has been undertaken and it is envisaged that this doctoral investigation, examining dance practices in Leicester and London will address this imbalance.

This dance ethnography draws primarily on interpretive anthropological strategies that seek to discover the socio-cultural expressions within the religious practices of a community. I examine the dance forms and the context in which these take place, following trajectories established by dance ethnologists in focusing on the people of the community and their perceptions as the agents for the production of knowledge. My enquiry traverses several disciplines, using methodologies drawn from sociology, folk-life and performance studies, anthropology and ethnology and it intersects too with economic, historical, cultural, religious and performative issues. This broad approach reflects the complexity of the research field. 'The performances of faith', that is, the dancing practices located within Hindu religious practice as embodied activity, are interrogated as 'ways of knowing' (see also Coffey 1999). As Deidre Sklar has noted in her ethnographic study of the Catholic fiesta in Tortugas, New Mexico:

if ways of moving are also ways of thinking, then it would be possible
to look for answers to my large questions in the movement of the fiesta...
If spiritual knowledge is as much somatic as it is textual, then clues to faith,
belief, and community would be embedded in the postures and gestures
of the fiesta.

Sklar 2001a:4

Sklar's emphasis that movement, postures and gestures are the embedded expressions of a community's spiritual knowledge, or their faiths and beliefs, is the premise taken for this research.⁵ In this way, I view the body and its actions as a means of expression and

of knowledge. The investigation focuses on the community's performance of faith through their dance practices, and seeks to discover through the gestures and postures of devotional action, through movements performed at religious festivals, and through ecstatic and trance dance how these may be clues to the meanings of faith of the community. I too take note of Diana Eck's phrase 'human grammar of devotion' (1998:48) which she employs in describing the Hindus' reverent offerings and actions to their deities. The detailed acts and gestures present in temple worship and in the dance movements are part of the 'grammar of devotion' that creates, I would suggest, the 'performances of faith'.

The concept of 'performing faith' is expressed too in anthropologist Milton Singer's notion of 'cultural performances'.⁶ In attempting to identify units of observation during his fieldwork in India, Singer noticed

the centrality and recurrence of certain types of things I observed in the experience of Indians themselves. I shall call these things "cultural performances" because they include what we in the West usually call by that name – for example, plays, music concerts and lectures. But they include also prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals, and all those things we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the "cultural" and artistic.

Singer 1955:27

Singer shifts from a western understanding of performance that involves a separate performer and a non-participatory audience to the participatory forms of religious expression to explain his notion of cultural performance.⁷ This theme is pursued in the ethnographic work of this research where interrogation has been made of such events as religious festivals, ceremonies and ritual in which the community participates. In discussing ritual and religion, cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz cites Singer and describes how such elaborate and usually public ceremonies 'shape the spiritual consciousness of a people' (1973:113). He further states how Hindus frequently use them as a way to exhibit their religion and its meaning to themselves and to any onlookers, a notion I found was present too in my fieldwork investigations. This concept of 'cultural performance' relates closely to the title of this thesis – 'Performing Faith' – and it is in this sense that the term 'cultural performance' is understood here.⁸

Although I use the western terminology ‘dance’ to describe the movement forms examined in the research, I take note of anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler’s advice on the usage of the term to describe the movement practices of other cultures. She writes that ‘categorizing the movement dimensions of a religious ritual as “dance” can easily lead to misunderstanding across, and even within, cultures’ (1999:14). Mohd Anis Md Nor notes too how, in the past, Malay structured movement systems ‘had numerous terms of reference...that are local and reflect specific forms or styles...peculiar to a region, dialect group or community’ (2001:238). It was only with colonial rule that the term *tari* as an equivalent to the English word ‘dance’ was introduced. Kaeppler’s caution resounds directly for the UK Gujarati community and their folk dance forms displayed at religious festivals such as *Navratri*. These movement practices are never termed ‘dance’ by the Gujarati community, as the word does not relate to movement practices embedded within a religious tradition (see Chapter Three for further discussion).

Different, and contrasting genres of dance are considered throughout the research: classical and folk, high cultural forms and popular forms, staged and participatory styles, and religious and secular categories. Although these definitions often overlap, they too carry perceptions of difference and of preference, as I argue in relation to funding issues in Chapter One. Definitions of these categories, and their meanings to community members where dance forms an integral part of religious worship are now examined.

iii. Dance and movement practices: what’s in a name?

I examine first the terminologies used in practice by dance teachers in both field sites and then proceed to contextualise these within the wider world of South Asian dance. Dance teachers and students interviewed used both ‘Indian dance’ and ‘South Asian dance’ as general terms, plus the name of the specific dance style, such as Bharatanatyam⁹ or Kathak. ‘Classical’ and ‘traditional’ were also utilised for these styles. The hybrid dance style popular in Indian films is commonly termed ‘filmi’ or ‘film dance’, or just ‘Bollywood dance’. Finding a term for the new forms of dance created by the dance teachers is more problematic, as using the expression ‘modern’ brings images of western modern dance. The description ‘creative’ dance was used by some, and ‘contemporary’

by others, but as Joan Erdman notes in discussing innovative Indian choreographies, ‘ To call it “creative dance” is to deny that all dance is creative; to call it “contemporary” is to merely place it in the here and now’ (Erdman 1996:303). ‘Creative/classical’ and ‘modern Asian’ were also terms the dance teachers used for this genre.

The distinctions of ‘classical’ and ‘folk’ although now in widespread use in South Asian dance in Britain, remain too somewhat problematic. Originally, as Iyer argues, these binary classifications were ‘not indigenous to the sub-continent’ (1997b:5), as the original categorisation of *margi* and *desi*¹⁰ (often incorrectly glossed as ‘classical’ and ‘folk’) was not as straightforward as our modern distinction of these same terms. *Margi* is described in the *Natyashastra* (a codified Sanskrit treatise dealing with dance, drama, music, poetics and aesthetics and thought to have been composed in the first centuries A.D.) as the movement forms for dance and drama which were pan-Indian and referred to different geographical areas, languages and tribes. The word *margi* in Sanskrit means a ‘high or proper course’ and *desi* translates as ‘of the country, provincial, vulgar’, although modern colloquial usage of the term means a ‘fellow Indian’ or anything related to India, i.e. *desi* food, dance, or friends. *Desi* dance practices developed in the regional, local traditions as variants of *margi*, but were also sophisticated forms in themselves and not analogous to folk dances, as is assumed today.¹¹ Both *margi* and *desi* contained aspects of religious practice, as also solo and group forms, dance-dramas and story-telling. Kathak dancer Shovana Narayan explains:

The *Natyashastra* dwells in detail on the discussion of the various aspects of such a production. With the passage of time, drama, music and dance developed in individual streams coalescing together to give rise to various forms and schools within each stream of art. This was the genesis of the various forms of folk and classical dance traditions.

Narayan 1998:52

Scholar Kapila Vatsyayan states how the twin concepts of *margi* and *desi* extend over the fields of music, drama, dance, aesthetics and language, stressing too how the two categories are distinct yet related (1987). She notes that they were not applied with any hierarchical connotation, as they are qualitative artistic terms, not sociological categories. Vatsyayan argues that:

Indeed a continuum between the two is evident, in most spheres of Indian art

... the *margi* and the *desi* cannot be equated simply to sacred and mundane, because in a single 'performance' or piece of work both may be contained.

Vatsyayan 1987:16

The *devadasis* who performed the basis of today's classical Bharatanatyam also included in their dance repertory folk forms (Gaston 1996:269), and Kersenboom writes too of the *devadasis* performing 'group dance compositions to popular songs, with or without sticks' for secular entertainment' (1991:144).

There remain further historical dilemmas with these categories. The bifurcation into distinct and weighted binary views of what is considered 'classical' and 'folk' still resonates today, influencing policies of arts funding (as I argue in Chapter One), performance publicity, and political issues. The term 'classical' carries notions of permanence, of an unbroken continuity as well as the accepted features of classicism, such as formality, symmetry, harmony, restraint, order and codified forms. This establishes a binary opposition that sees the 'folk' forms as informal, unordered, unrestrained, implying a sense of inferiority and simplicity. Buckland (1983) notes six ideal characteristics of classical music which can adequately be applied to the 'classical dance' context (these follow A.E.Green's lectures on folk music in 1978). They are: a prescriptive written body of literature accompanying the form (c.f. The *Natyashastra* for South Asian dance); formal institutions of learning; distinction between the performer and a passive audience; support from wealthy patrons; and a continuity of transmission supported by accredited standards e.g. examination systems and a taught syllabus. Coorlawala argues how in the 1970s in India, 'almost every dance form claiming antiquity and sophistication, noted references within the canonized *Natyasastra*' (2004:54).

The following diagram indicates some of the common assumptions carried by these often contradictory labels of 'classical' and 'folk'.

CLASSICAL	FOLK
Global	Local
<i>Margi</i>	<i>Desi</i>
Performative/presentational	Participatory ¹²
Great tradition	Little tradition
Solo	Group/community
Choreographed	Improvised
Urban	Country/regional
Sophisticated	Primitive
Complex	Simple
Superior	Inferior
High art	Popular art
Restrained, conventional	Free, unconventional

Figure 1. Assumed definitions of ‘classical’ and ‘folk’

These assumed characteristics refer back to an evolutionist paradigm, based on ideas from Darwin in which societies were believed to evolve in the same way but at different times and stages. In classic folklore theory, such ideas lie behind the concept of ‘folk’, creating a notion of superiority defined as ‘classical’ as opposed to an uneducated, inferior construct of the notion of ‘folk’ forms. Buckland reminds us how the concept of ‘folk’ in folklore studies ‘owes most to interpretations of the work of eighteenth-century German theologian and philosopher, Johann Herder’ (Buckland 2002:418). Herder’s support for a systematic collection and analysis of folkloric materials was underpinned by a nationalist belief that saw local customs and verbal lore as the key to revealing an ‘essentialized national character’ (Barnard and Spencer 1998:236).

Despite the deconstruction of the binary notions of ‘folk’ and ‘classical’ and the dichotomy of the ‘collector’ (of folklore) and the ‘tradition bearer’ (the Other) in anthropological and folklore research in the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and the USA,

many residual assumptions of the above kind remain in the minds of the dance-viewing public (Appadurai et al 1991:467-468). My research indicates too, that the Bharatanatyam form investigated here at the community level, taught and performed in the Tamil temples, remains a presentational, performative style, adhering to notions of a superior classicism, and is highly valued within the community for these reasons.¹³ The examples in the Gujarati community of the *Raas/ Garba* folk dances are, conversely, participatory forms which need no particular pedagogic instruction, are less complex to perform and arise out of an agricultural, rural history – all historically situated characteristics of a ‘folk’ paradigm.

iv. Notions of tradition and innovation

There is consensus in academic analysis today that the notion of ‘tradition’ as an unquestioned narrative linking contemporary practices with an often mythic past has no objective reality (Buckland 2001, 2002). Hobsbawm’s well-documented theory of ‘invented traditions’¹⁴ appears a more applicable category for such beliefs, particularly when applied to the histories of South Asian dance forms such as Bharatanatyam and Odissi, as Erdman (1996) and Ramphal (2003) suggest. However, as Buckland argues, a closer reading of Hobsbawm reveals that his intention in introducing this concept ‘is best understood as an explanation of responses to the development of the nation state’ (2002:434). ‘Invented traditions’ has also been challenged by some as being too simplistic an approach (O’Shea, forthcoming). Acknowledging the accepted concept of continuity implied in the word ‘tradition’, O’Shea states that:

Most dancers who define their work as classical bharata natyam agree that a sense of continuity should undergird choreographic endeavors. Nonetheless, individual dancers disagree as to what the most important aspect of the dance form’s history is, what elements should be maintained or revived, and how best to express allegiance to that history. Concepts of authenticity, tradition, classicism, and history do not rely on implicit consensus; rather, they frequently provoke dissent.

O’Shea, forthcoming.

Kumudini Lakhia, a classically trained Kathak dancer and choreographer, teaches her students at her school in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, the strict tenets of the classical idiom – correct bodily placings, intricate footwork, traditional fast turns, knowledge of rhythm -

only so that they have a framework from which to move in a more contemporary format. She teaches them the traditional rules so that they can then go beyond the form, telling them “Now you must forget everything”. She further explained:

What can you break if you don't know what to break? You must know the rules, then you can break them. That's what makes a good performance. It's a kind of dichotomy – you learn something, then you break it. They have to become creative...

Lakhia, cited in David 2004:35

Her imaginative choreography has its base in classical technique, but she openly acknowledges the tension between maintaining tradition and ‘the desire to be free’. She further stated:

I learnt from the traditional masters...As inheritors of their art, it was our responsibility to acknowledge its greatness and not violate its spirit, dilute or trivialise it. That was a greater challenge. I have never lost sight of that responsibility. How could we make the technique relevant to our times?

Lakhia, cited in Kothari 2001:85

Lakhia is ‘all the more striking because she negotiated her individualistic identity and her unusual vision of Kathak within the hegemonic patriarchal world of Kathak dance’ (Chakravorty 2000:236). Her students are encouraged to question the time-honoured traditions of the world of classical dance in an atmosphere of mutual respect and intellectual challenge. Lakhia is certainly famous for pioneering creative contemporary work within the Kathak idiom, although innovation and breaking away from tradition in classical dance can be found as far back as Rabindranath Tagore's dance-dramas (1920-30), Uday Shankar's experimental work of 1930-40, and Mrinalini Sarabhai's political dance-dramas of the 1950s and 1960s.

Scholars from both America and India writing on indigenous dance traditions within their own countries have noted how tradition implies a process of adhering in some form to the past and simultaneously being prepared to change and adapt. Susan Spalding describes in her studies of American folk-dancing that:

We view tradition primarily as a process; we understand it to be a very fluid concept that includes both discontinuity and continuity, one that accommodates the notions of preservation and invention.

Spalding and Woodside 1995:2

Similarly, dance scholar Kapila Vatsyayan writes of how the antiquity of the dance styles of India embraces the contemporary world in a ‘subtle eclectic approach seemingly ancient but in fact an expression of modern sensibility’ (1974:8). Royce, too, discusses in relation to ethnicity, the paradox of maintaining the past whilst embracing the present, stating, ‘ “Tradition” is a term most frequently used to describe the factor that bound and characterized ethnic groups. However, most groups display change in response to changing situations’ (Royce 1982:147). These pragmatic approaches, although perhaps simplified, do offer a resolution to the problematising discourse of tradition versus modernity that is often loaded with power struggles and political debate.

The inherent pressure between adhering to traditional form and absorbing new techniques to allow the dance form a contemporary and significant praxis continues to be problematic in the cultural landscape for today’s immigrant communities. My research questions the processes of cultural transformation in which selection, modification and change are evident simultaneously with an attachment to values and practices of the past. These issues are identified and addressed in the later chapters interrogating the Gujarati and Tamil groups, revealing the difficulties for dance teachers and performers in maintaining what they perceive as the traditional form. This raises questions relating to notions of conservation and authenticity, to who might be the stakeholders in tradition, and to processes of adaptation, and are specifically discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

v. Selected field sites

Classical anthropology as practised in the early twentieth century was based on long-term immersion in the field, the minimum period of stay being one year, and it focused on the study of cultures further afield, and often somewhat exotic ones. In contrast, fieldwork in one’s own country has tended to be the domain of sociological or folk-life research.

These patterns of research, however, are changing as the global and local are realised as being inextricably linked:

a new generation of students has emerged whose environments oscillate between the global and the local; whose enjoyments of cultural practices finds the modernist concepts of popular and high art a straightjacket irrelevant to their lives; and whose experiences and identities transcend those of mono-nationalism.

Buckland 1999:3

Carrying out fieldwork at home, in urban settings in Britain yet in communities that are 'other' than my own, I locate myself and this project as Buckland states, 'between the global and the local' (ibid), and have found the necessity to encompass both popular and high art forms in the course of the research. Fieldwork has followed the patterns of folklore studies, where visits are made on an irregular basis as well as to regular annual festivals. Opportunities to meet community members for discussion and interviews have had to be fitted in as schedules allow, rather than during long-term immersion in the field. These strategies have their disadvantages and tensions which are revealed in an analysis of methodology in Chapter Three.

There is a wide range of practices and styles of South Asian dance existing at a community level throughout the whole of Britain which play a significant part in community life and the transmission of cultural knowledge and values. These include the boisterous male Punjabi folk dance, *Bhangra*, and the Punjabi women's dances of *Giddha* and *Luddi*, practised not only at the Punjabi Sikh New Year¹⁵ in the British Punjabi communities, but at weddings, celebrations and other social events. The *Bhangra* dance form and its powerful influence on British Asian pop music has yet to be documented and studied in depth. There are too the events and performances held in UK Jain¹⁶ temples where dance has played a prominent part in the celebration of religious festivals.

For many years at the Leicester Jain *Mandir* (temple), an Asian dance teacher from outside the Jain community was employed to prepare the dance events for the Jain April festival of *Mahavir*. This teacher described how she would work with the young and older women (and some men) for about two months preceding the event in the evenings and weekends, preparing four different groups and creating her own choreography. The four groups would present traditional folk dances from Gujarat; contemporary Indian (for the more experienced dancers and using Indian classical music); 'Bollywood' style of steps and music using a cultural or political theme, for example a song relating to India's independence (this group also included men); and religious dance, choreographed by the teacher, but using music and lyrics given to her by the Jains. The lyrics would relate to their deity. She told me that for this dance, she would perhaps use candles and would

include devotional movements used in temple worship, such as a full bow to the deity. Interestingly, this was the group that everyone wanted to join. These performances took place in the community hall below the first floor temple where there is a stage, and if the budget allowed, lighting was hired for the event. Dance competitions have also taken place in the temple hall. Since 1999 however, the Jains have organised the dance events themselves (author's fieldnotes 18.2.02 and 11.5.02).

Other areas of religious dance include the devotional, ecstatic dance that may be observed in the ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) places of worship throughout the UK. During the course of fieldwork, visits have been made to the ISKCON temple in central London and the main centre and ashram, Bhaktivedanta Manor in Watford, north of London. No performances of dance have taken place at either of these temples, although the Leicester ISKCON temple has organised performances by a professional Odissi dancer (see Chapter Four: 29). The leader of the Watford temple told me he is very interested in dance, and that some of their devotees learn Bharatanatyam at the Bhavan Centre in London (see below). If they were ever to have a performance, it would take place in their auditorium, where cultural events such as plays and music are put on. What may be observed is what is termed the "swami step"; steps performed by the devotees in the temple as they repeatedly chant the *Hare Krishna* mantra to the beat of a drum and cymbals. The footsteps are simple – one step to the right, then step close both feet together; repeat to the left. The sequence then repeats indefinitely. The bodies move to the rhythm and the hands and arms also move freely around in the air to the rhythm. At times when the beat increase in tempo, the devotees' steps will transform into jumps and the whole body movement will be 'wilder' and more abandoned (author's fieldnotes 7.2.02 and 6.5.02).

The Bhavan Centre in west London¹⁷ (for details, see Chapter One: 3) is one of the most well known establishments for the teaching of traditional forms of Indian music and dance and is worthy of detailed examination in relation to its policy of preserving its 'classical heritage'. The exigencies of time and focus, however, of a three-year Ph.D. research project have necessitated relinquishing these other rich veins of community

dance material to concentrate on Hindu dance practices within a religious context, that is, in temples, at religious festivals, and related events. Fieldwork visits have been made to many of the above cited temples and events, but regrettably, they fall outside the main focus of the study.

To examine contemporary South Asian dance practice within the field of Hinduism in Britain and particularly related to religious practices, two urban sites – the cities of Leicester and London - have been selected for ethnographic enquiry. The influence of the contemporary urban landscape on cultural practices, and specifically on dance expression has been explored in Helen Thomas' edited book *Dance in the City* (1997a), which suggests that 'the contemporary fragmented city is a centrifugal force for the mapping of bodies in space and time' (ibid. x). Stuart Hall stresses the urban influence in terms of globalisation, stating:

If you look at cities of the world, not only current and contemporary ones, but also historically, cities have been the sites of globalisation from below for centuries, which is one of the reasons why the metropolis has been such a powerful source of cultural and creative energy. It has always been a place where, through trade, through exile, through family linkages, there has been a conglomeration of different cultures working together.

Hall 2003:9

Both the cities of Leicester and London have a strong infrastructure for religious and dance practices and are therefore appropriate sites for this particular research. The sociological and academic criteria for the selection of these two cities are set out below; it is also necessary however to add that several personal factors were taken into consideration when making the choice. Studying at De Montfort University in Leicester was a practical and personal reason for selecting the Hindu Gujarati community there, in addition to the significant factors of that particular Hindu group (stated below and in Chapter Four). As I live in London, the practicalities for continuous visits to London temples, to interview informants and to participate in festivals, for example, were obvious, and I had already numerous contacts in the London South Asian community and in South Asian dance (see Chapter Three). Of the many Hindu communities established in the UK, one of the largest is in London and its suburbs, and the second largest is in the city of Leicester, with others in Bradford, Leeds, Coventry and Birmingham. A brief

introduction to these fields of investigation follows and further detailed background and analysis is presented in subsequent chapters.

Although two field sites are selected, this study does not set out to be a comparative one, as each community expresses its practice of Hinduism in uniquely different ways. The approach to the two field sites therefore is one of exploration of two different case studies. The two Hindu communities chosen for this research are intrinsically different in their backgrounds, language, ways of worship and adherence to Hinduism, but are both communities with a history of expulsion, trauma and rupture which has led to their settlement in the UK. Both are viewed as ethnic communities by the host nation, and both consciously and overtly practice their religion. As Panikos Panayi states:

Immigrants in post-war Britain have created an ethnicity revolving around religion, politics and culture. The first of these is very important for newcomers. Because of the trauma of immigration, they have a need for spiritual support, which means they inevitably fall back on their religion.

Panayi 1999:20

What are the similarities of response to those influences, and how do they differ? How have they responded, adapted and reacted to the host nation and dominant culture found here? How have they maintained and negotiated their boundaries and cultural identities? These questions are raised and addressed in this research with particular reference to dance practices located in a religious context. The dance practices themselves bifurcate into two strands of classical and performative (Bharatanatyam), and folk and participatory (*Garba* and *Raas*).

It is possible however, to make some comparison in each communities' response to the diasporic situation; that is, their reactions to a new urban environment where there has been a thrusting necessity to establish their societies in unfamiliar and at times hostile surroundings. A comparison can be made also of the effects on the respective communities of their displacement from their previous homelands. A view of the worldwide Indian diaspora as a milieu for choice – a choice that includes preservation, innovation, integration or seclusion - is given here by Jeyasingh:

The culture pertinent to it is characterised by a balancing act between old and new; memory and present day reality. The members of this diverse community live their life in a cultural roundabout where many histories meet. A continuous stream of

new arrivals at differing states of acclimatisation makes sure that nothing stays fixed for long. The choice as to what road to take – preservation, innovation, community, mainstream, integration, seclusion or a mix of any of these are all possibilities – remains a purely individual one.

Jeyasingh 1996:74-75

I would suggest that this is not only an individual choice, but a community one in addition. Questions arise related not only to the choices cited above, but also to methods and effectiveness of the transmission of culture, of the community's cohesiveness, and of the meanings and values of their socio-cultural systems. These questions and further related issues are addressed in this thesis and give rise to a greater conceptual understanding of the two communities. Additionally, it is important to note that the two field sites do not fall neatly into Leicester Gujaratis and London Tamils - both Hindu groups have settled in both cities, although the Gujaratis are more numerous in Leicester, and the Tamils in Greater London. Some fieldwork has been undertaken in Gujarati communities in London in addition to the principal focus on the Leicester groups, mainly due to my London Gujarati contacts encouraging me to attend London *Navratri* celebrations and because at times, of a greater ease of access.

Roger Ballard's South Asian research (2003) indicated that by the end of the twentieth century, Britain's South Asian population included nearly two million people. His figures cite around a million Punjabis, divided into one group of half a million Muslims and another of half a million Sikh, Hindu and Christian, the latter group breaking down into 80% Sikh and the remaining 20% Hindu or Christian. Ballard also notes the three-quarters of a million Gujaratis in the UK, which can be sub-divided further into approximately 80% Hindu and 20% Muslim. Finally, Britain plays host to about a quarter of a million Bangladeshis who are predominately Muslim. It is significant to note that Ballard's analysis excludes the Tamil population in Britain – as have many academics and commentators on Britain's South Asian presence (see Jacobsen 2004). The latest approximate figures of Tamil settlement in the UK are 200,000 (see details in Chapter Five).

UNITED KINGDOM



Figure 2. Map of United Kingdom showing Leicester, London and other main cities.
[Courtesy of M.Lubikowski of ML Design]

v.1. Leicester

Leicester, as a field site for ethnographic work within South Asian dance provides rich resources. It is a UK city that is ‘today internationally recognized as a model of civic multiculturalism, and ...is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the European Union’ (Martin and Singh 2002:7). Leicester is the largest city in the East Midlands and the tenth largest in England. In the 1991 government census, almost twenty-four per cent of Leicester’s 283,000 population was of South Asian ethnic origin, and some estimates now give figures rising to nearly fifty per cent by the year 2010 (ibid:8). It is also one of the most thriving Asian communities in Britain, and receives committed support from its City Council. Over the period of the last thirty years, a strong and confident relationship has developed between the Asian peoples and the City Council, both economically and socially, resulting in over 1,500 successful Asian businesses in the city and the election of two Asian Lord Mayors, one MP and numerous councillors. The majority of the Hindus in Leicester are originally from Gujarat in north-west India and many are twice-migrants, having arrived in the UK after being expelled from their homes in East Africa over thirty years ago. Prior to this, their families had initially migrated from India during the nineteenth century to work for the British on the construction of new railways in East Africa. Factors of immigration and resettlement are therefore a dominant aspect of community life in Leicester and make a significant impact on areas such as the transmission of dance and culture. I present a comprehensive account of the Gujarati’s particular immigration history in Chapter Four.

Consideration of Leicester as a metropolis, albeit on a much smaller scale than London, enables the dance and movement practices to be examined within the spectrum of the life of an urban city in a contemporary setting. Features of the metropolis such as the fragmented, dislocated life of an urban area, the struggle to maintain coherence of community life, the pressures of time, work and survival and the creation of unfamiliar living conditions do impact on the lives of any community and therefore are revealed in their dance practices. Sanjoy Roy, in his analysis of ‘otherness’ in contemporary Indian dance in the western city, describes the city as ‘a place where a profusion of peoples, goods, histories and languages circulate, intermingle and interfere. A multiplicity of

nationalities and ethnicities inhabit and traverse it' (1997:69). New civic initiatives that are being developed in Leicester, however, include a £14.4 million project called the *Belgrave Baheno Peepul Centre* and a new multi-million pound performing arts centre, scheduled to be completed in 2006. The performing arts centre is planned to be part of a new 'cultural quarter', regenerating a dilapidated area of the city with a film and media centre, a contemporary visual arts centre, and studio spaces for artists and crafts people. Discussions are also underway to establish a production base in Leicester for Indian films made in Europe, backed by the City Council¹⁸. These initiatives indicate a positive, vibrant and visionary move to counteract the fragmentation and dislocation inherent in city and in immigrant lives.

Evidence from my research in Leicester has revealed few dance and music events connected with the Hindu temples in general terms and on a regular basis, but during Hindu religious or cultural festivals, dance (mainly folk, creative or film) is dominant. Therefore the emphasis of the research in Leicester has not been in the temples, as in London, but at the large-scale festival celebrations, and the transmission of dance in dance schools and by independent teachers. At some Gujarati Hindu events, dance is positioned as a spectator activity, where the devotees will watch items of Kathak, Bharatanatyam, folk and filmi dance performed on stages; at other occasions such as the very prominent *Navratri* celebrations, the dance form is wholly participatory. There is significant evidence however that the dominant dance form is changing, with less emphasis on the strictly classical forms and a strongly burgeoning interest from the young people in 'Bollywood'¹⁹ film dance; verification of this and an investigation of causes is presented in Chapter Seven, in addition to a discussion on innovation and change.

v.2. London

The *South Asian Dance in Britain* (SADiB) report (Grau 2002:7) acknowledged that London was far more prominent than the rest of the UK in developments in South Asian dance, revealing that it had the greatest number of performances and other related activities, as well an enormous concentration of dancers and teachers of South Asian

dance forms. There were, for example, at least sixty South Asian dance schools in London in 2002, compared with only sixty in the rest of the country. Bharatanatyam, the classical form favoured in the Tamil community, remains the overall privileged form, receiving much more attention in both teaching and performance (Grau 2002).

There are a wide variety of Hindu groups in London which include the Indo-Caribbean community, the Gujaratis (consisting themselves of many varied groups and caste associations), the Punjabis, Bengalis and the Tamils. The presence of these sects is clear evidence that the diaspora community is a not a homogenous one, despite common mythology depicting the contrary (Albrow 1997, Eade 1997b). The Tamil UK population is made up of Tamils from south India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Malaysia and Singapore and is therefore too not a homogenous group. The Sri Lankan Tamils are the largest group, numbering over 150,000 and their first settlers arrived in Britain in 1956 when Sinhalese was made the official language of Sri Lanka in opposition to Tamil. There followed an increase in immigration to Britain in the late sixties and early seventies, when a strong and active community began to develop in Greater London. Many of these Sri Lankans have fled to Britain during the last twenty years as escalating sectarian attacks have threatened their lives in Sri Lanka. Issues of resettlement, relocation and dislocation feature powerfully in the lives of this immigrant community, and impact directly on the transmission of culture and religion; these issues are discussed in full in Chapter Five. Listed in the 2003 *Tamil Pages* are seventeen Tamil temples in Greater London, which range in size of building, years of existence and 'congregation' numbers. Some temples are attended predominately by Sri Lankan Tamils, others host a mixed community of Tamils from south India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Malaysia. Not all of the temples have dance or music events taking place, but a selection of five with a strong and thriving 'congregation' which hold related dance events and have formed part of the focus of this research are:

- The Shree Ghanapathy Temple²⁰, Wimbledon (south-west London)
- The Highgatehill Murugan Temple, Highgate (north London)
- The London Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham, (east London)
- The London Sri Mahalaksmi Temple (East Ham)

- The Sri Kanagathurkkai Amman Temple, Ealing (west London).

Of these five Tamil temples, two are principally south Indian - the London Sri Murugan Temple and the London Sri Mahalakshmi temple - rather than Sri Lankan. Of the five, the Wimbledon Ghanapathy Temple claims to be the first fully consecrated Tamil Hindu temple in Europe, having been established in 1981 after many years of smaller scale worship in the founder's home. Visits to all seventeen temples were not possible due to the time limits of the research programme, so after fairly exhaustive enquiries, the above temples were selected because of their interest and encouragement of cultural practices, particularly dance. Additionally, two other Tamil temples, the Shree Thiruthanigai Vale Murugan Temple, a recently-established temple in Surbiton, south-west London and the Muthumari Amman Temple in Tooting, south London, were visited on two occasions when dance performances occurred. This, of course, does not imply that the other temple organisations which do not host performances of dance or dance classes do not maintain an interest in promoting music and dance; it may be that there is already adequate provision offered by dance schools in the area, or that a 'temple' is not yet fully established and may be operating in hired premises.

The Tamil community is of particular interest to my research as the Tamils view their cultural expression as an integral part of their religious lives, and therefore great emphasis is placed on the learning of classical forms of music and dance. The south Indian classical dance style of Bharatanatyam forms a significant part of the cultural activities in these temples as well as the study and performance of Karnatic²¹ south Indian music, especially by the young people of the community. The significance of the Bharatanatyam classical dance as a Tamil cultural identity marker is explored in Chapter Five. In two of the selected Tamil temples, classical dance classes feature on a weekly basis and these follow a structured syllabus with examinations. Dance performances also take place within the temple or the adjoining community halls during festival occasions in all five selected temples. It is important to note here that the dance form of Bharatanatyam, located in these temples and their adjacent halls is non-participatory for the devotees. Performances at festival times are to be watched, to be enjoyed and to form part of the religious expression in the temple, and the dance classes remain the sphere of

the children and young people. This is in contrast to the Gujarati Hindus whose dance expression at *Navratri* is mostly participatory (see endnote 13).

The use of the sacred/ritual temple space for dance performances raises questions as to whether the dance performance is for the deities or the audience of devotees, and this is examined in Chapter Six. In subsequent chapters I address the more general perceptions of dancers, dance students and temple devotees of dance in relation to religiosity and spirituality, and analyse the contemporary pivotal relationship between dance and the temple.

Not only has the fieldwork revealed the predominance of the classical dance style of Bharatanatyam as a significant identity marker for the Tamil community, but ecstatic and trance dance have been found to be a regular feature of some Tamil religious occasions such as *Tai Pusam*, and the *Ter*²² festival. I have attended these festivals at the Ghanapathy Temple, the Ealing Amman Temple and the Murugan Temple (East Ham). These particular dance forms and their relationship to community life are interrogated in later chapters, as are the related issues of dance and possession, gender, and notions of purity and pollution.

Ethnographic fieldwork using participant observation techniques, interviews, questionnaires and video recording (see accompanying DVD for film extracts from fieldwork) has been undertaken at these five main temples in Greater London, and this methodology is discussed in detail in Chapter Three. There has been scant exploration to date of the UK Tamil community of either a social or cultural nature, and there is a scarcity of research or information relating to the Tamil diasporic community.²³ One anthropological Ph.D. thesis undertaken at London University's School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS) in the early 1990s explored 'The Symbolic Construction of the Sri Lankan Hindu Tamil Community in Britain' (Taylor 1994), and its author has two further published papers arising from that research (Taylor 1987, 1991). A forthcoming monograph on *Skanda* worship in the UK is planned,²⁴ and Joanne Waghorne's publication, *Diaspora of the Gods* (2004) discusses five of the main London Tamil

temples as part of a wider study of new Hindu temples in India and the USA. No other academic studies have been located relating to the British Tamil community. It is intended that this research will contribute towards filling that vacuum and will give a voice to the community in both academic and social circles that has so far not been expressed.

In the last decade, several scholarly studies have begun to address the growing diasporic Tamil population in countries such as Denmark (Steen 1993 and 1997), Switzerland (McDowell 1996), Malaysia (Willford 2002), Germany (Baumann 1995, 2002), South Africa (Diesel 2003), and Norway (Jacobsen 2004). These studies deal with a variety of issues that feature in Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic life, such as the celebration of the annual *Tai Pusam* festival, the notions of Hindu consciousness and Tamil revivalism, and aspects affecting the migration of and displacement among Tamil refugees.

vi. Outline of thesis

The thesis is divided into three major parts: Part 1 - 'Setting the Scene and Entering the Dance' – consists of an introduction and the three first chapters. In introducing the thesis, I address the central research questions and present the context of the fields of research and their development. Terminology of the dance forms is examined additionally with particular emphasis on the concepts of 'classical' and 'folk' and the related and often vexed issues of tradition and innovation. Theories within folklore studies are drawn upon as well as the Indian terminology of *margi* and *desi*. Chapter One focuses on the phenomenon of South Asian dance in Britain and its substantial history, and discusses its relationship with the host country shown in the patterns of government funding over twenty-five years. I examine the tension between professional performance and participatory community dance forms in terms of funding and note the preferred 'official' view of valuing innovation over tradition. To complete Chapter One I review the relevant literature in relation to four main themes of the thesis: dance ethnography, South Asian dance, South Asian communities in the UK, and the broad field of the practice of Hinduism.

Chapter Two turns to the theoretical frame underpinning the thesis, where I interrogate theoretical constructs of identity, since identity of an ethnic, religious or cultural nature is a significant player in the formation of immigrant or diaspora communities. The changing nature of these identities, particularly post-September 11th 2001, is noted and interrogated. In this context, the notion of ‘community’ is explored and its conceptual meaning within anthropology and sociology is discussed. I consider these meanings in relation to the Hindu communities that form the subject of this thesis. Chapter Three concludes the first section of the thesis by presenting the methodological approaches utilised in the research – dance ethnography, anthropology, folklore studies and sociology – and provides a background of theoretical discussion for these methods. Issues relating to the practice of ethnographic fieldwork are presented in detail and particularly where they pertain to actual fieldwork carried out for this research.

In Part 2 of the thesis – ‘UK Fieldwork –Leicester and London’ - I present my fieldwork material from the two specific urban sites of Leicester and London. Chapter Four deals initially with the history and immigration patterns of Leicester’s Gujarati Hindu population and the changing nature of their patterns of worship. I consider too the dance practices located in the main Hindu festivals celebrated in Leicester, that of *Navratri*, *Mahasivaratri*, *Ratha Yatra* and *Diwali*. The folk dance forms of *Garba* and *Raas* that are performed primarily at *Navratri* and their significance in ‘performing faith’ for the Gujaratis are the central focus of this section. The chapter then traces the history of Asian dance in Leicester and relates the accounts of contemporary voices in the dance arena – those of dance teachers, dance students and some professionals - through questionnaires and interviews. Finally the question of transmission of the dance forms and the use of dance examination systems is addressed.

Chapter Five continues Part 2 of the thesis by presenting the evidence of fieldwork carried out in the Tamil community in London. The immigration patterns and the UK history of the community is charted, with the emphasis on the Sri Lankan element of the community as this is the most dominant in terms of population numbers. I argue that the roles played by the Tamil language and the classical dance form of Bharatanatyam are

central features of Tamil identity, bringing evidence from the fieldwork to support this view, particularly in relation to Bharatanatyam. This emphasis continues in detailed accounts of Bharatanatyam dance practices and performances located in five selected London Tamil temples where the major part of my fieldwork was carried out. To contextualise the presence of the dance forms in the temples, I also present accounts of the establishment and development of these five temples during the last twenty years and their future plans. The chapter closes with contemporary voices of dance professionals and students discussing their perceptions of the place of dance and its role in their 'performances of faith'.

In Part 3 of the thesis, 'Analysis, Discussion and Reflections', I reflect on the evidence gleaned from the fieldwork and problematise some of the central issues arising. Firstly, in Chapter Six, those issues relating to dance within the context of religious worship are raised: these include respondents' perceptions of religiosity in dance, the relationship of dance and the temple, 'possession' during dance performance and an analysis of the part played by Hindu concepts of purity and pollution. Evidence is given to reveal how these concepts impact on the dance practices and on considerations of gender. I examine in Chapter Seven the changing nature of Hindu community dance traditions, and show the influence of Bollywood film dance to be a major factor in this transformation. Details of Bollywood dance in Leicester and London are analysed, and the effect too on transmission of the dance forms is considered.

In concluding the thesis, I revisit the major research questions and themes, looking first at how Bharatanatyam performance in temples, possession or trance dance during religious occasions, and the Gujarati playing of *Garba* and *Raas*, are in fact, performances of faith. These embodied, orthopractic forms create an experience of the 'doing' of religion, where doing is believing. They too allow a specific Gujarati or Tamil identity to be strengthened and endorsed. The layered diasporic identities of the communities reveal both a syncretic, fluid notion of identity alongside a more fixed concept of identity that is handed down from generation to generation, confirming that these groups are at different junctures of diaspora settlement. The thesis gives voice to the members of the Hindu

communities that have not been heard in academic dance discourse and documents the fertile ground of local dance practice that is the carrier for discourse on questions of identity, ethnicity, authenticity and religious beliefs in a diasporic setting in Britain.

Chapter One of the thesis now sets the scene in detail, beginning with an overview of the history of South Asian dance in Britain and the issues relating to funding of this dance genre.

Notes:

¹ *Devadasi* is a shortened form of the Tamil word *tevaradiyal* which translates as the 'slave of the God' (Srinivasan 1985:1869). It literally means 'at the feet of the God' and is used to describe the hereditary female dancers in south India who were dedicated to the temple at an early age and performed dance and ritual worship before the deities. These dancers would also perform at secular occasions (for further details see Chapter Six). It is important to note too that *devadasi* practice varied from region to region and according to which religious tradition they belonged (Gorringe 2000a:11). In this regard, Daves Soneji critiques of the use of the term *devadasi* as an umbrella term to connote all temple dancing women from all parts of India, glossing over all distinction of origin and vernacular differences (2004:32). Avanthi Meduri comments that there is no equivalent English term for the name *devadasi* as their sexual freedom and artistic prowess 'had its roots in a culturally accepted polygamy alien to modern western culture' (1996:11).

² The SADiB report (Grau 2002) touched on community dance issues, but did not focus on this arena.

³ See also Nasta 2002:6 and Grau 2002:39-40 for their comments.

⁴ Bharatanatyam, originally known as *sadir* or *dasi-attam* is an Indian classical dance style from southern India and developed in the Hindu temples. It was re-named in 1933. Kathak, a classical dance style from northern India, takes its influence from the Moghul court and is famous for its fast turns and intricate footwork, as well as its story-telling aspect.

⁵ Sklar herself acknowledges that it was Allegra Fuller Snyder (1974) who first conceptualised the idea of dance as a way of knowing.

⁶ See also Victor Turner's reflections on the origins of the word 'performance' (1982a:91), where he notes that the first meaning from Old French that came into Middle English carried the more processual sense of "bringing to completion", or "accomplishing", rather than the 'structuralist implication of manifesting *form*' (ibid).

⁷ Phillip Zarrilli argues that 'cultural praxis' is a better term than 'cultural performance' as it moves away from the contested characteristic of a culture that is fixed and embraces a more 'fluid process of creating meaning' (1998:255n).

⁸ As a theoretical discipline, performance studies developed in the 1970s and 1980s out of the work of Erving Goffman (1959), Richard Turner (1969, 1982a), J. L. Austin (1962), Maurice Bloch (1974), Gregory Bateson (1978) and Richard Schechner (1988) and others. As a discipline, it is problematic to define, seeking as it does to analyse the 'doing' of performance across a range of modalities (music, dance, theatre, film, literature, art) of artistic expression. It focuses on the embodied practice – the 'living, breathing (and often ephemeral) performance itself' (www.arts.usyd.edu.au/Arts/departs/perform, cited in Schechner 2002:5)

⁹ The renaming of the dance form of *Sadir Attam* to Bharata Natyam, literally meaning 'dance of India' not only linked the dance to nationalism, but also to the classical canon of the Bharata's *Natyashastra*, 'so establishing the dance as possessing an ancient spiritual and aesthetic heritage, and as an equivalent to status of classical as in western ballet' (Coorlawala 2004:53). Coorlawala notes too that the two words were joined to form Bharatanatyam in the mid-1980s to note the dance form as a specific regional style, and that the capitalisation of the word has now become contested by dancers and academics in Britain, as ballet and contemporary dance do not use capitals. (See *Pulse*, Spring 2002 Editorial n.p.). Coorlawala concludes that 'how you spell the term clearly indicates your political location in the discourse' (2004:54).

¹⁰ Various writers and commentators have made their own distinctions between the two forms. Reginald Massey describes *margi* as dance sacred to the gods, or danced for the gods, whereas *desi* is dance for human pleasure (Singha and Massey 1967:22). Padma Subrahmanyam's detailed study of the sculptural dance poses in Indian temples led her to articulate a theory that *margi* was the original base technique of all Indian dance, out of which developed *desi* or regional styles such as *Bharatanatyam*, *Kathakali*, *Kathak* etc. (Subrahmanyam 1988). See also Indira Viswanathan Peterson's (1998) discussion on the distinction between *margi* and *desi* where she notes that *desi* is a more complex concept than perhaps usually thought, and states that, 'Definitions and descriptions of dance and music forms classified as *desi* suggest that the term has a very wide provenance, encompassing a variety of phenomena whose origins lie in popular, non-canonical, regional and tribal milieux' (ibid:41).

¹¹ Peterson also argues that the term *desi* cannot just be equated with the word 'folk', and goes on to suggest that the genre *desi* emerged out of the practices of lower-caste women from specific regions (1998:41).

¹² For further discussion of participatory and presentational dance categorisation, see Nahachewsky 1995.

¹³ The values placed on Bharatanatyam by the Tamil diaspora as a perfect carrier of tradition and as a valuable cultural marker are discussed in Chapter Five. Although I describe Bharatanatyam here as a performative/presentational style in contrast to the participatory *Raas/Garba* folk forms, I would also suggest this categorisation of the 'performances' of Bharatanatyam in the temples is problematic. The devotees watching in the temple are not necessarily detached viewers of a 'performance', or passive onlookers to a separate performer. They are engaged spectators, perhaps even participants in the sharing of evoked *rasa* through the dance, particularly at a religious festival. The presence of the deity intensifies the moment, so that the *rasa* experienced is akin to the moment of *darshan* – the seeing and being seen by the deity – which is not a passive act. It is a participatory experience, although not of actual engagement in performing the dance movements. I would suggest, at certain key moments, the dance for both dancer and audience alike is a 'cultural performance' (using Singer's notion) or a 'performance of faith'.

¹⁴ Hobsbawm writes: "'Invented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past' (1983:1).

¹⁵ April 13th or 14th is considered to be the Punjabi New Year and celebrated by the Sikhs as a joyous religious event, termed *Vaisakhi* (or *Baisakhi*). The day marks the time when Guru Gobind Singh founded the order of *Khalsa Panth* ('community of pure ones') in 1699.

¹⁶ Jainism began in India and is thought to be one of the world's oldest religions. The term *Jain* means a follower of the *Jinas* (spiritual prophets) who are a line of human teachers thought to have gained perfection of spiritual knowledge. Jainism has no belief in an all-powerful creator God, but does share some features of Hinduism whilst rejecting the authority of the Vedas. Some Hindus will worship in Jain temples and visit Jain places of pilgrimage (Werner 1997). The Jain temple in Leicester was established in 1979 in a converted Congregational chapel by the Jain *Samaj* (a society or a religious caste or organisation), who had been meeting together in Leicester since 1973. It has a large hall on the ground floor underneath the temple which is used for weddings, community events and performances of dance, drama and music.

¹⁷ The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, or Bhavan Centre as it is now known, was established in London in 1972 as a UK branch of the same organisation in Mumbai, India. It is primarily a secular teaching institution, called 'Hindu-centric' by some, and values a traditional approach to the learning of classical forms of music, dance and languages. Since 1975, it has been based in premises in west London, using the site of an old church and newly enlarged adjacent buildings.

¹⁸ See *The Times* 7.2.04, p.3 and the *Leicester Mercury* 9.2.04, p.3.

¹⁹ Bollywood: This has come to mean a particular type of dance that is an integral part of the genre of Indian films that have a reputation for escapist fantasy. It is an expressive form of dance, drawn from folk dances, classical dance styles of Bharatanatyam and Kathak, and now even jazz dance and hip-hop, with the movements closely related to the words of the song. See Syal 2002, and Chapter Seven of this thesis for further discussion.

²⁰ This is the spelling used by the temple, but the usual anglicised form is 'Ganapati' or 'Ganapathi'.

²¹ Karnatic music is the name of the classical system of music originating in the south of India, distinct from the northern or Hindustani style.

²² *Tai Pusam* is an annual Tamil Hindu festival dedicated to Murugan, Lord Siva's son and is celebrated in January. The ritual movement practices and significance of this festival are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Terotsava – another annual Hindu festival occurring in August during which the temple deities are brought out of the temple and carried around the surrounding streets on a wooden chariot (*ter*).

²³ Various websites offer general information about the UK Tamil organisations. These include temple websites, Tamil groups, Tamil pages, and the London Borough of Brent. Some are only in Tamil, and others in English.

²⁴ Professor Ron Geaves (University College, Chichester) who has also carried out detailed and published research on the UK Muslim community is preparing a book on Saivite worship in the UK.

CHAPTER ONE: South Asian Dance in the UK

1.1 Looking back

Indian dance, or as it is now more generally termed by dance practitioners, writers and audiences in the UK, 'South Asian dance', has a long history in Britain. The first recorded performances by South Asian dancers were in 1847 at the Adelphi Theatre, London. Billed as *The Bayadères*¹ or *Priestesses of Pondicherry*, the five female dancers and three male musicians had been brought from the main Vishnu temple at Tiruvendipuram, near Pondicherry, in the south-east of India. Playing to packed and rapturous audiences, they toured England and France for a period of eighteen months.² Later in the 1800s, the then-current excitement and appetite for the Great Exhibitions gave rise to particular displays that proudly exhibited specific aspects of Britain's colonial world. The huge *Empire of India and Ceylon Exhibition* held at Earl's Court, London in 1886 boasted large groups of south Indian and Sri Lankan dancers, musicians and 'nautch girls'³ who performed daily shows for the crowds that came to inspect these 'natives' from their colonies.⁴

During the following thirty years, except for the Asian dancers and performers brought over to appear in such exhibitions as the Franco-British Exhibition in 1908 at White City, London, there is little evidence of performances of Indian dance by Indian dancers.⁵ Instead, stage presentations were dominated by interpretations of dance from the East, or 'Oriental dance' as it was generally termed. The dancers were European or American, and based their choreography on impressions and imaginations of the 'exotic' east and for the most part, had not undergone training at source in the classical styles they were imitating.⁶

The performances in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s by classically trained Indian male dancers, Uday Shankar and Ram Gopal and their companies, contributed to a dramatic change in attitude and appreciation of Indian dance in Britain, helping in part to dissolve

western orientalist views of a 'knowledgeable, superior' west and an 'exotic, but native' east. Effects from World War II such as the demise of colonialism and the awareness of more significant political and economic world issues, contributed to this transformation. Cultural expression in the forms of music and dance from all parts of the globe began to create a new and genuine interest. 'Established social structures were dismantled' (Siddall 1999:11) and the arts were turned to as a civilising factor 'in their capacity to promote social cohesion and individual inspiration' (ibid). The *Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts* (CEMA), later to become the Arts Council of Great Britain after the war ended, was set up by the government in 1946 as an educational, participatory organisation for public benefit. It received funding from the American Pilgrim Trust in addition to that provided by the government, and initially awarded funding for professional and amateur artistic work and the allocation of small grants. In London in particular the new interest in world-wide cultural performance was evident in, for example, the performances of classical Indian music by Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan, and in dance performance by groups from as far afield as China and America.⁷ London was now seen as a focal point for international recitals, receiving foreign artists with a more receptive and interested attitude, in contrast to its previous role as a colonial metropolis at the control of the heart of the empire. David Cannadine, discussing the dissolution of the British Empire, writes of how the new post-imperial regimes 'increasingly came to stand for national autonomy, open access, social equality, economic modernity, ethnic diversity and multiculturalism' (2001:160).

The more liberal and responsive outlook in Britain continued into the fifties and sixties with an increasing number of South Asian dance performances by Indian-based dancers⁸; these included such famous names as Ram Gopal, dancing both Bharatanatyam and Kathakali styles, Krishnan Kutty performing Kathakali, folk and Bharatanatyam, Mrinalini Sarabhai (Bharatanatyam and Kathakali), Shanta Rao (Mohini Attam and Bharatanatyam), Krishna Rao and Chandrabhaga Devi (Bharatanatyam). The arrival in the UK of thousands of Indian refugees in the late sixties and early seventies from East Africa brought a new and supportive audience for Indian arts, and created a community desirous of establishing its own culture in Britain. Within a few

years, organisations such as the Asian Music Circle, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (now known as the Bhavan Centre), and the Academy of Indian Dance were established.

The Asian Music Circle was founded in fact in 1953 by Ayana Deva Angadi with an aim to foster the appreciation and study of the music and dances of all Asian countries and it continues to promote music and dance recitals today. The Academy of Indian Dance, now Akademi, was created by dancer Tara Rajkumar in 1979, as ‘a pioneering organisation that works to encourage excellence in the practice of South Asian dance in Britain’ (Akademi website).

The late 1970s saw the growth too of smaller music schools, folk dance groups and a growing ‘energetic Gujarati [sic] theatre scene...Here were the people that danced, in their hundreds, for the annual nine-night festival of Navaratri’ (Khan 1997:26). In 1976, Naseem Khan was commissioned to report on the arts of the ethnic minority groups in Britain, and her publication, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, drew attention to the mostly unseen cultural expressions of the Chinese community, the Cypriots, the East and Central Europeans, the West Indians and three different groups of South Asians – Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. The report sets out in detail the many recommendations for support of these neglected areas, focusing mainly on the need to educate those in positions of responsibility for arts development, and on the need for funds to be available to support amateur community cultural work. The report summarises:

firstly existing bodies need to grasp their responsibilities to the arts of the new-British more firmly; secondly links need to be created that will foster the healthy development of those arts.

Khan 1976:130

Of course, funding was a central issue. In a postscript to a revised edition of the report two years later, Khan asked, ‘Where is the money deemed necessary? Where are the centres, the representatives on arts boards of ethnic arts?’ (ibid:iii) These issues, still of relevance, are discussed subsequently in terms of support for South Asian music and dance in the UK.



Figure 3. Map of India showing different states.

[Courtesy of M.Lubikowski of ML Design]

1.2 Issues of funding

The late 1970s and early 1980s also saw a change in government funding for dance, which until 1979 had been administered through the music department of the Arts Council of Great Britain.⁹ In 1980 not only was a separate dance division created, but

funding also began to embrace 'ethnic minorities' in its distribution, which included Black, Caribbean and Asian dance forms. During this time, South Asian practitioners based in the UK such as Shobana Jeyasingh, Pushkala Gopal (Bharatanatyam), Unnikrishnan (Kathakali) and Nahid Siddiqui (Kathak) received a certain level of funding for their work in performance, touring and education, as did several of the previously-cited organisations. Jeyasingh began her performance work in the UK as a solo Bharatanatyam dancer. Later she developed a company and moved to more experimental work drawing on South Asian classical dance styles as well as martial art forms. Gopal and Unnikrishnan, whilst retaining a classical base, also choreographed dance dramas and innovative items of dance. Siddiqui likewise maintained her classical Kathak, but also produced creative and innovative choreography within a Kathak idiom. This led to a marked increase in awareness and appreciation of South Asian dance.

In 1991 another new initiative heralded further support and funding for dance; this was the establishment of National Dance Agencies in various centres throughout the UK, following recommendations in Graham Devlin's hard-hitting report on the development of dance (Devlin 1989). This too enabled the setting-up of *ADiTi*, a national organisation for South Asian dance based in Bradford, north England, and allowed more funding to be allocated for different forms of dance, including South Asian. The following table indicates some examples of the level of government funding for South Asian dance that was in place by 1998. It does not include the general funding for South Asian arts organisations (e.g. Asian Arts Access with £10,000), nor grants specifically for Asian music, but does cover training, translation, touring and development work in South Asian dance.

DANCE COMPANY/ ORGANISATION	ARTS COUNCIL FUNDING 1997-8
Academy of Indian Dance [now Akademi]	£5,000 [for training]
Aditi	£65,000 [fixed-term funding]
Chitraleka & Company	£15,000 [independent projects]
Imlata	£40,000 [“ “]
Nahid Siddiqui & Company	£35,000 [“ “]
Piali Ray Mahasay	£4,000 [international initiatives fund]
Sampad	£14,500 [independent projects] £7,000 [training] £4,200 [translation]
Shobana Jeyasingh	£210,000 [fixed-term funding]
Srishti	£20,000 [independent projects]

Figure 4. Arts Council funding for South Asian dancers 1997-8.
 [Information taken from the ACE Annual Report 1998 and compiled by Ann David]

It is important to note here that the introduction of Lottery¹⁰ funding in 1995, firstly for capital expenditure (mainly the renovation of buildings, and in particular The Royal Opera House, London), and then in 1996 in new schemes such as ‘Arts for Everyone’, for the first time enabled amateur and community groups to apply successfully for financial support. This made it possible for fringe dance events like London’s *Dance Umbrella* to play an important and influential role in the promotion of new, young dance artists. Although the ‘Arts for Everyone’ scheme was sustained only for a brief few years, and had its critics, it left a legacy of a novel type of funding which suited new Labour¹¹ policies (art was no longer seen as elitist), and new categories of Lottery funding were established. The 1995 new Lottery money had become available after an extremely difficult period of 4-5 years of standstill funding, when many arts organisations suffered acute financial crises.

As shown in the above table, the Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company was the largest recipient of public funding for work derived from South Asian sources, whose total for the financial year 1997-98 was in fact £352,330, as it included grants from London Arts Board, plus money from commercial sponsors, in addition to the Arts Council fixed-term

funding. From Jeyasingh’s first performances in the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a solo Bharatanatyam dancer, when she gained only small bursaries for music and for touring, ‘she has achieved an enviable funding record from 1988 to 1996’ (Ajimal and Jasper 1996:11) for her contemporary dance company.¹² This considerable change in funding demonstrates how Jeyasingh’s newly created product fulfilled two main objectives that the Arts Council supported in its dance budgeting; that of innovative work, and of non-western dance. Jeyasingh’s

new product was both innovative in choreographic terms and yet rooted in a non-Western tradition. This new direction...was rewarded with a rapid and successful rise in funding, status, and choreographic output.
Ajimal and Jasper, 1996:11

The dance section of the 1998 ACE Annual Report highlights how the ‘country’s independent and contemporary dancers are attracting growing audiences to a diversity of venues’ (Annual Report 1998:20), emphasising again how the policy for funding favoured innovation (and still continues to do so) in contrast to traditional and folk forms of dance, despite the interest in non-western styles. Significantly too, Lord Gowrie, the then-current Chairman of the Arts Council, in his annual review used the terminology of ‘high arts’ in speaking of the funding policy of the Arts Council (ibid:8).

DANCE COMPANY/ORGANISATION	ARTS COUNCIL FUNDING 2002-3
Akademi	£154,068 [grant-in-aid]
Mavin Khoo	£47,000 [national grant]
Nahid Siddiqui & Company	£38,000 [national grant]
Sampad ¹³	£25,998 [regional arts lottery programme]
Shobana Jeyasingh	£278,342 [grant-in-aid]
Srishti	£33,000 [national grant]
Kala Sangam	£115,000 [lottery] £54,000 [grant-in-aid]
Anurekha Ghosh & Company	£26,225 [regional arts lottery programme]
Sonia Sabri Company	£25,810 [national grant]

Figure. 5. Arts Council funding for South Asian dancers 2002-3.

[Information taken from the ACE Annual Report 2003 and compiled by Ann David]

An examination of the level of funding five years on in 2003 reveals certain changes and a level of growth in allocation of subsidy to South Asian dance companies, performers and groups. Financial comparison of the years 1998 and 2003 is problematic, as the grant information in the 2003 Annual Report is presented in a distinct format that lists only grants of over £25,000; additionally there are new and different schemes of funding that have been created. More money has been allocated to Asian community schemes that include dance activities as part of their remit, for example, the Federation of Patidar Associations (one of the largest Hindu Patel caste affiliations in the UK), who received subsidies of £48,320 from the Lottery fund for lighting and sound equipment for their new building. The Patidar Association had in 2003, approximately 150 students learning various Asian dance styles¹⁴ at their centre in Wembley, north London, and state in their written objectives that:

The Federation believes that the Performing Arts from the Indian sub-continent have an important role to play in a multi-ethnic society both in continuing a tradition and educating others about it, and in contributing to the fusion and mixing which can enrich the arts of a multi-ethnic society.

www.patidars.org

The Bhavan Centre in West Kensington, London, for many years independent of government funding, has also received high levels of financial support from the Arts Council through the Millennium Commission and through the Lottery Capital Projects Scheme for its new building and for renovation of its existing auditorium. It has of course had to raise a high percentage of the capital through private means, and does additionally have commercial sponsorship. In Leicester, in 2003, the new *Belgrave Baheno Peepul Centre* received over £150,000 of grants from the Arts Council for its new building, a large percentage of which was allocated through the regional arts boards. This innovative Asian community centre, due to be opened in 2005, will house a large auditorium and dance studios in addition to exhibition spaces, workshops, music practice and recording facilities, as well as health care, counselling services and education facilities. Money awarded to this type of community project, however, has drawn criticism of government policies on arts spending. John Tusa, director of the Barbican Centre, London, discussing his book, *Art Matters – Reflecting on Culture*, during a BBC Radio 3 arts programme, spoke of a perceived contradiction in the government's arts policies:

If someone wants an urban area regenerated, you build a theatre, or an art gallery, or a performing arts centre. Wonderful. It works well. But what about the funding on a continuous scale? Do the arts matter for their own sake? There seems to be a flaw in the heart of the argument. Are the arts valued for themselves, or are they just an instrument of economic policy, of education policy, or regeneration policy?

Tusa, May 9 1999, Radio 3 (transcribed from tape)

The relationship between the government and the arts, sixty years on from the inception of the Arts Council, continues to be a problematic and uneasy one, and one that is too, reflected in the struggles of community dancers and dance teachers to gain any substantial form of funding for their work.

Despite the difficulties noted above, the Arts Council cultural diversity action plan set up in 1998 states that the Arts Council was ‘firmly committed...to treating cultural diversity as a central issue, echoing Black, Asian and Chinese artists themselves who have long rejected anything that resembles “minority” status’ (Khan 2002:2), and it pledged to support ‘the traditional and the hybridic, the classical and the folk-based’ (ibid:4). Evidence of this is shown in two particular East Midlands examples: firstly, the Arts Council’s BRIT initiative (Black Regional Initiative in Theatre), set up in the mid-nineties offered funding for a new partnership to be formed between De Montfort University and the Leicester Haymarket Theatre, where Asian arts administrators could attend the BA course as non-paying students whilst working at the theatre. By late autumn 2004, one Asian student had completed the degree and another was partway through the course.

Secondly, in Leicester in 2003, dance performer and teacher Nilima Devi’s organisation *Centre for Indian Classical Dance* (CICD) was awarded almost £90,000 funding from the regional arts programme by East Midlands Arts. This was allocated for ‘developing training projects for talented young dancers across the East Midlands region and to work with venue promoters across the six counties to establish regular showcase performances’ (www.cicd.org.uk). The money will also help to establish a national dance festival in Leicester in 2005 featuring a central conference with performances and debates on current issues in South Asian dance. These details indicate that money is now becoming

available on a greater scale for Asian community arts projects, rather than solely for the professional performers.

It is clear that initially public interest in and government subsidy of South Asian dance focussed on the more experimental and innovative work that was beginning to emerge, with some support being given to the classical dance forms. Research investigating South Asian Dance in Britain (SADiB)¹⁵ found that many South Asian classical dancers still experience discrimination in relation to funding for their work. The dancers stated that in their view,

hybridity is seen as synonymous to “challenging” and “innovatory” and therefore worthy of funding, when this could also be the case within classical idioms, which receive little funding

Grau 2002:11

The problems and tensions of seeking and obtaining funding for professional performance and for community dance projects within the arena of South Asian dance appear as a recurrent theme throughout this research. The results of interviews and questionnaires presented in the fieldwork section, Chapters Four and Five, reveal how pressing an issue this is for most practitioners.

Most of the performance work referred to in the SADiB report was secular in nature, and not directly related to the religious expression of Hinduism, revealing a relocation of practice away from the dance’s acclaimed spiritual origins¹⁶ to non-religious, staged performance. The fact that the Arts Council and the dominant culture in the UK has separated dance from religion contributes to a lack of interest and therefore a lack of funding for community dance practices within a religious context, as investigated here.

The SADiB report has confirmed that the dance activities located within the community,

whilst receiving no public funding and little public recognition, nevertheless have an important impact in the everyday lives of individuals of both South Asian and non South Asian origins and undoubtedly make their life richer and more enjoyable.

Grau, *ibid*:8

The report from SADiB also acknowledges that South Asian forms of dance are being recognised artistically to an extent that has never existed before, that the time is

propitious for new development, and yet no proper support is available academically or professionally.

There is no academic journal in Britain that specialises in the field, for example, and only one professional magazine *Pulse* exists. Furthermore, although research projects such as ours have been and are carried out; and a number of PhDs have been awarded and more are being undertaken, everything is piecemeal, sporadic and isolated.

Grau, *ibid*:13

These comments in the SADiB report enable this present research to be contextualised in the wider field of South Asian Dance in Britain and reveal the pressing need for studies of this kind. Not only does the report recommend more bursaries for doctoral research in this area, but it also charts the need to ‘encourage the publication of monographs looking at aspects of South Asian dance so that a growing body of knowledge can be developed for both teaching and research’ (*ibid*:15). This would impact on the important relationship between diaspora community dance practices and the funding policies of the host nation by bringing to greater attention the dance forms that remain generally unseen and yet have unrecognised and significant importance to both the communities themselves and the host nation. It also enables the voices of community practitioners and the dancing devotees ‘performing their faith’ to be heard, as in the global life of classical and professional dance these voices have been muted.

1.3 The legacy of the devadasis

In seeking to discover whether these community dance practices embedded in a religious setting are part of a reverse trend that locates dance and religious practice in a unitary trajectory, rather than a move into secular performance as witnessed in professional productions of South Asian dance in the UK and elsewhere, I present a brief analysis of the legacy of the *devadasi* dancers. This analysis will contextualise the place of ‘religious’ dance in South Asian practice and assist in assessing its relevance in a consideration of a community’s ‘performances of faith’. Further examination of the influence of the *devadasis* in the light of contemporary practice is given in Chapter Six – ‘Locating Dance in Hindu Religious Practice’.

Several international scholars have written fully of the complex and contested history of the Indian *devadasi* dancers (Srinivasan 1983, 1985, 1998; Kersenboom 1987, 1991; Gaston 1996; Meduri 1996). There are some parallels and some ironies that are revealed in examining their story and today's South Asian community dance practices. Firstly, I have considered the funding issues related to both professional and amateur SAD (South Asian dance) in the UK, in this chapter and throughout the thesis, and have indicated the difficulties experienced by dancers and teachers to obtain support for their performances and initiatives. The *devadasis* were professional dancers who performed at temple rituals, temple events and secular performances outside of the temple complex, such as weddings and other celebrations. Indian literature provides sources as early as the fifth century AD where descriptions of dancing girls in both temples and courts may be found. At certain periods in history, some of the larger south Indian temples would have employed hundreds of *devadasis* (see Marglin 1990:215, and Fuller 1984).¹⁷ *Devadasis* were found in many regions in India and their practices related to their local region and to the particular religious tradition they were attached to. They had duties and obligations as part of their professional status, and received financial rewards for their services from wealthy patrons. They continued to perform into the early part of the twentieth century, despite growing opposition from the anti-naught campaigners. Yet, during the reinvention and renaming of the dance form of Bharatanatyam in the 1930s from the original *sadir devadasi* dance, by Rukmini Devi and others¹⁸, dancers would not perform for money. This was a move to distance themselves from what they considered the disreputable *devadasis*, who, it was thought, were taking money for prostitution.

I would suggest that this problematic tension between professionalism and payment in the field of SAD remains today. Indeed, Shanti Pillai writes of the present financial difficulties facing dancers in Chennai, south India, the home of Bharatanatyam dance:

In Chennai, almost all dance concerts are free. Patronage of the performing arts has all but disappeared and government support is minimal. This means that the individual dancer not only receives nothing for the performance, but also that she or he must frequently meet all of the production costs.

Pillai 2002:17-18

The situation is further compounded by the fact that NRIs (non-resident Indians) from the UK, USA and elsewhere bringing in foreign money to pay teachers, promoters and

musicians are 'in part responsible for creating inflated expectations' (ibid) and inflated prices. Avanthi Meduri too writes of young dancers in today's India, stating

If they have the economic means, they buy the best instruction available.
If not they do not, but have the talent, then they struggle. The path to fame is not easy. The students with economic power shop around for the best teachers and test them out. It used to be the other way around...At all times money is needed.

Meduri 2001:110

It is a complex and interdependent situation embedded with global and local tensions and emerges from a global history that invokes colonialism and nationalism, and which continues to be a significant discourse in the post-modern, post-colonial period of today.

A second issue relevant to contemporary practice is associated with the *devadasi* aim to provoke in their ritual and non-ritual performances an experience of *rasa*¹⁹ in the participants/devotees/audiences, experiences described by Marglin as 'emotional-cognitive-spiritual transformations' (1990:212). The *rasa* brings a 'refined, spiritual experience in the spectators' (ibid:224) conveying, it is thought, the divine power of love. During the temple ritual, the *devadasi* is thought to become a conduit for the feminine, creative force of the deity and it is this that the devotees may partake of. This element of transformation is still apparent today, perhaps exemplified by a temple performance of a Bharatanatyam dancer in London in February 2002 (see Chapter Five: 20.). The same dancer also spoke of the transformative effect of her performance at a Hindu religious celebration which took place on a stage, not in a temple, the day after.

As soon as I had put my foot on the stage I felt I had walked through a membrane. I did not feel that I was dancing – something else had taken over...Also, because the devotion of the piece had been conveyed to the audience – quite a few people said they had been moved to tears. One man expressed my feelings exactly when he said that it was not me dancing, but Siva.²⁰

Personal communication 28.3.02

Her comments confirm the experience of *rasa* in her audience on this occasion.

There is a further strand to the contested ambiguities and ironies between contemporary dance performance in Hindu temples and its co-relation with *devadasi* practice. This can be seen in the context of the music for the dance. Temple service in Tamil Nadu, India

was not only rendered by the priests and *devadasis*, but also by temple musicians who called themselves the *Isai Vellala* (music landlords). They were an all-male hereditary group who became a powerful political force in the DK and DMK²¹ movements as the *devadasis* declined in the early part of the twentieth century. These men were also the transmitters of the dance, not only playing for performance but also conducting the movements as *nattuvanars* – speaking the rhythmic syllables to accompany the dancer's footwork. The musicians played in two different groups using different instruments – one group, the *periamelam* (big drums), used mainly for outdoor events and some temple ritual, and the second group, the *chinnamelam* (small drums) which played specifically for evening ritual worship and for dance performance, although in some events, they were interchangeable (Srinivasan 1998b).

In today's temple ritual in Tamil temples visited for the research, I found temple musicians playing not only for ritual periods during festival times, including for the *kavadi* trance dance (see Chapter Five), but also for Bharatanatyam performances during the *Navratri* festival. One occasion was in October 2004 at the Tamil Mahalakshmi Temple in East Ham, when the temple musicians playing two *nagaswaram* (reed instruments) and two *tavil* (drums) accompanied young Bharatanatyam students and their teacher for several dance pieces, including a *Jatiswaram* duet²², a *Kathakali* solo story dance and a devotional Siva item. Bharatanatyam dances are not usually performed by today's temple musicians, so this was an atypical event, but with elements of original *devadasi* performance. Fuller notes that some temple musicians in the Minakshi (Meenakshi) temple in Madurai, south India, in the 1980s, were descendants of *devadasis* who had performed in that temple prior to the 1947 government ban (1984:40).

There is too a growing trend at Hindu marriage celebrations in the UK to employ a dancer to entertain the guests, an element somewhat reminiscent of the practice of the *devadasis*, who were paid to perform and bring a level of auspiciousness to a wedding occasion (Kersenboom 1991:146, Gaston 1996:16). Several dance teachers in Leicester spoke of how their groups, or solo dancers from their groups were frequently asked to perform at weddings. Charles Quincey, a London-based semi-professional Kathak

dancer from Trinidad was booked to dance at a London Hindu wedding in 2003, but on arriving at the venue, he was turned away as he clearly was not the female South Asian dancer they were expecting (interview 12.9.04). Another young Bharatanatyam dancer described how she and several other dancers from the Bhavan were booked to dance at a London Hindu wedding. They performed four or five traditional items, including a prayer to Ganapathy and a *Tillana*.

Figure 6. *Nagaswaram* players at the *Ther* chariot festival, Shree Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon, August 2004.

Figure 7. *Tavil* player accompanying Bharatanatyam *Navratri* dance performance at Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, East Ham, October 2004.

1.4 Reviewing the literature

As this thesis locates itself within differing disciplines and academic territories, a wide analysis of the relevant literature not only frames and contextualises the study but also identifies any existing gaps in scholarly publications. This review of the academic literature reveals how scholarship in dance ethnography is growing in both Europe and the USA, as are the studies interrogating the field of South Asian dance in India and in the diaspora. Further review is made of the general literature on ethnography, anthropology and sociology in relation to this research in the discussion of methodology in Chapter Three. Many of the South Asian communities now living in Britain have been the subject of anthropological and sociological studies, although there remain obvious gaps in writing concerning the Sri Lankan Tamils and scholarly research on the dance

and cultural practices of the South Asian communities. Ballard (1994) notes the urgent need for further knowledge in this arena:

anyone who writes about the South Asian presence in Britain necessarily finds the experience like mounting a tightrope. Given the yawning knowledge deficit among the remainder of the population, there can be no dispute about the urgent need for the production of descriptively accurate and analytically sophisticated accounts of the minority presence.

Ballard 1994:vii

I examine too the literature relating to the practice of Hinduism, on the whole a well-documented area, in the light of the discussion in this text of practices of *puja* in the temples. There is a, however, paucity of research and written literature specifically directed at the UK context. This would encompass, for example, the changing patterns of Hindu worship in Britain and the adaptation of certain practices within different Hindu caste groups.

1.4:1 Dance ethnography

Dance scholars working in the field of dance ethnography have focused their attention on the dance and movement systems of particular societies, examining them as expressions of cultural knowledge, and questioning why and how and when a community dances or moves. Similarly, dance ethnologists working in North America describe the direction of their work as ‘the study of dance as an aspect of human behaviour’ (Snyder 1984:23) which draws on anthropology and the social sciences. Deidre Sklar’s monograph (2001a) wrestles in particular with questions about performance and the embodiment of belief. She attempts to discover how the spiritual knowledge of the small Catholic community was ‘embedded in the postures and gestures of the fiesta’ (ibid: 4). Living with the people and observing their lives and their movement practices during the annual fiesta time, Sklar concluded that the spiritual experience was a kind of ‘doing, a transformation enacted upon oneself through the details of work’ (ibid:184). This led her to the understanding that ‘ways of moving are also ways of thinking’ (ibid:4). Her work in this field regarding expression of faith through dance practice provides an interpretative frame for the present study in which I investigate how faith is revealed through dance practices within Hinduism. Sklar’s detailed description of the Tortugas women working

communally in the kitchen, sitting in a circle chopping onions preparing the food for the fiesta, speaks of a devotion and a 'sacredness' in the activity:

Chopping onions in the women's kitchen was not like chopping onions at home. In the doubled awareness that was the Virgin's presence, meaning was worked into the rhythms, postures, sounds, and dynamics of doings.

Sklar 2001a:189

Scenes of some similarity were observed during my fieldwork at the Hindu *Swaminarayan* Temple in Leicester. In a crowded hall adjoining the temple, devotees had gathered on a Friday evening to listen to a spiritual discourse given by a young *swami* from the London branch of the temple. Apart from a few elders who sat on chairs at the edge, all were sitting cross-legged on the floor, men at the front, and women and children at the back. Before the *swami's* long address and during the singing of devotional *bhajans*, I watched a large group of women who were sitting in a circle, with vegetables and bowls spread out before them on newspapers on the floor, rhythmically sorting, chopping and preparing the food. Rice was picked over to remove stones, green vegetables were cut up into large bowls, and vast quantities of chillies stacked ready for cooking. They were listening to the religious songs of the young *swami* as they worked, quietly and attentively, with the pungent smells of the freshly chopped vegetables pervading the area. It was a kind of choreography, as Sklar describes (2001a:82); a choreography both practical and devotional. Sacred and secular had no division – the devotion and care of the vegetable preparation mirrored the devotion to their *guru* – both were ultimately an articulation of faith, a 'performance' of faith.

My research in the London Tamil temples has revealed a parallel theme where the 'dynamics of doing', that is, where the body and its actions are seen as an articulation of knowledge and where the gesture and postures of devotional action appear to be demonstrating a 'performance of faith.' Observing the priests at the Ghanapathy Temple in Wimbledon during a special *abisheka* (bathing and anointing ceremony) for the main deity, I watched the gentle, careful, detailed movements of the priests' hands as they poured different liquids (milk, water, mashed fruit, yoghurt, ghee, honey) over the large form of the elephant-headed statue. Accompanied by ritual chanting, the statue was then

meticulously dried with a towel and rubbed tenderly with oil before being dressed. The process of dressing the deity was carried out with such mindful and loving attention, it was as if watching a mother dressing a child. The silk cloth with a green and gold border was pleated, then tied around the deity's form and tucked into place. Gold necklaces and colourful flower garlands were carefully placed around the neck and more flowers in the lap of the God. Still accompanied by the sound of the vedic chanting of ritual prayers, the priest then decorated the forehead and trunk of Ghanapathy in traditional manner, completing the occasion by placing an ornate silver surround to frame the back of the deity (author's fieldnotes 8.3.02). The devotees then moved forward to perform *arati* and to take *darshan* at the climax of the ceremony. The intensely practical, yet detailed and affectionate gestures of the priests form a choreography which articulates their devotion to their deity, a way I would suggest, of 'performing their faith'.

It is research into these kinds of arenas that is best served by dance ethnography, focusing as it does, on people and their dance activities. The year 1999 saw the publication in Britain and North America of the first major collection of international writings dedicated to the practice of fieldwork within dance ethnography. Edited by Theresa J. Buckland, a British dance anthropologist trained in folk life studies, the book draws on dance scholarship from several different theoretical perspectives – anthropology, ethnomusicology, ethnology and folk-lore studies – and offers to the reader a breadth of ethnographic and anthropological experience from eminent dance scholars from eastern and central Europe as well as North America and Britain. In this publication, Kaeppler discusses issues of fieldwork from an anthropologist's point of view, looking at the ways an anthropologist might place observed human movement systems into a theoretical frame in order to analyse and understand what meaning, if any, could be conveyed through those movement systems. Within the same volume, a contrasting approach is offered by Anca Giurchescu whose background and training is in European ethnochoreology. Giurchescu raises the issue of working within one's own culture, a fact, as she points out, 'which, naturally, has shaped my fieldwork strategies' (1999:45) and that has both benefits and drawbacks. This too has parallels with this study, where I am working 'at home', and yet an outsider to the community being investigated.

Giurchescu describes how she ‘learned to be curious, always asking “why?” and “for what purpose?”’ (ibid), strategies that offer guidance on a practical level in methodology and also provide a context for the present research topic in meeting analogous issues. The findings of other contributors in this volume raise aspects significant to this particular research. Owe Ronström’s work amongst the Yugoslavs in Sweden, for example, draws attention to the importance of the whole of the dance event, not just the performers themselves. He investigates the people who play non-participatory dance roles - the musicians, the organisers, and the elderly people of the community who watch - and he notes the significance of these parts in relation to the dance itself (1999:138). As I later discuss, all the ‘players’ at Hindu dance events similarly have valuable parts to contribute. Ronström discusses the import of these dance evenings for the immigrant population of Yugoslavs in Sweden, showing how the events are effectively transmitters of culture to the younger generations where certain behaviours can be learnt and internalised. This is particularly evident in bodily praxis - ‘“being Yugoslav” in Sweden included an upright carriage of the body and the use of distinct, controlled movements’ (ibid:139), something to be learnt and practised at such an event. Similar influences are observable in the Hindu *Navratri* festival celebrations, where the older generation watch from their places on the edge of the dance space, observing closely how the younger generations are dancing, with whom they are speaking and how they are behaving. The learning of selected and approved behaviours is evident too at the Hindu religious dance festivals. Babies are carried as the women move, and children as young as three and four participate in the event, assimilating the correct moves and demeanours appropriate to the occasion.

1.4:2 South Asian dance (and music)

Existing literature that focuses on South Asian dance in the UK is not extensive, consisting mainly of specially commissioned reports, and one academic collection of papers, produced predominately in the late 1990s. This latter work, edited by Alessandra Iyer (1997a) in the *Choreography and Dance* series, covers a comprehensive range of topics: South Asian dance courses at university level in Britain, the history of South Asian dance in the UK, and classical aspects of the Bharatanatyam style. It also includes

South Asian dance and the internet, the teaching of Kathak dance in Leicester and contemporary dance choreographer Richard Alston's collaboration with Shobana Jeyasingh. It is a significant academic work, which not only draws attention to the wide scope of the South Asian dance in the 1990s in Britain, but is also the first of its kind to engage with these topics.

Prior to this publication, various reports commissioned by East Midlands Arts (Gahir 1984) and by the Arts Council (Jarrett-Macauley 1997) on South Asian dance specifically in the Midlands, and for the whole of England, reviewed the numbers of dancers and musicians working, the types of work they were doing (school workshops, community teaching, regular classes, performances, touring) and whether the funding given was adequate. Recommendations were suggested by both reports for new initiatives to increase awareness of the dance forms, to encourage audiences, to increase training and further funding. Akademi (the old *Academy of Indian Dance*) commissioned Iyer to investigate issues of South Asian dance and higher education, published in 1997(c) as the *South Asian Dance Vocational Course Development Project*. 1996 saw the publication by ADiTi (The National Organisation of South Asian Dance) of a teacher's handbook *South Asian Dance in Schools*, (Gordziejko), an innovative move by South Asian dance practitioners. It emerged out of three years of work by ADiTi on syllabus research in accordance with the National Curriculum, and from a carefully piloted scheme of teaching South Asian dance in west Yorkshire schools in 1994. In 1996 Leicester City Council's 'Living History Unit' produced a booklet entitled *Parampara – Continuing the Tradition: Thirty Years of Indian Dance and Music in Leicester* (Hyde et al). Using oral history techniques, it records the account of the extraordinary histories of the Asian community there and reveals the strength of its relationship with music and dance. A further significant report on the two-year research project SADiB (South Asian Dance in Britain) carried out by Grau, Lopez y Royo and Gorringer at Roehampton University was published in 2002 (Grau 2002). This report explored issues of cultural identity within South Asian dance and firmly acknowledged the need for further research on performance and choreography. It also revealed the sparse nature of professional academic support for South Asian dance compared to western theatre dance, and offered

recommendations to address this need. Stacey Prickett's *Dance Research* article (2004) addresses the teaching of South Asian dance in the UK within the British Dance Tradition, an area not yet examined in any detail.

Surveying a wider geographical scene that encompasses the Indian diaspora, Kalpana Ram's anthropologically-orientated articles (1995, 2000) on the effect of migration on the classical forms of Indian dance in Australia, and Sanjoy Roy's (1997) weaving of metaphoric constructs with theory in examining Indian dance forms in the modern city throw light on some of the issues being raised in this study. The problems of migration and the role dance plays in reaffirming community and identity are posed by the two authors, and both conclude that Asian immigrants (whether in England or Australia) remain in a contradictory position regarding their heritage and sense of their identity. This is complemented by Ketu Katrak's research on the dance practices of second-generation South Asian Americans in Southern California (2001, 2004) where she examines ethnicity in the arena of dance praxis, and diasporic use of tradition and innovation within the dance form.

In Anne-Marie Gaston's analysis of Bharatanatyam's transition from temple ritual to stage performance in India (1996), her interviews with teachers, dancers and students present a rich and informative study of the changes of technique, repertoire, teaching styles, performances and attitudes to the classical dance form. Much of the data she has amassed, although related to practice in India, is relevant to the work of the current research being undertaken, and documents changes that are also evident in Britain. A further volume of collected articles, edited by David Waterhouse (1998) emerged out of a conference at the University of Toronto in 1985 entitled 'Dance of India: Culture, Philosophy and Performance'. The book draws together dance scholars and practitioners from India and North America and includes a range of subjects relating to the dance of India. Of particular interest is one ethnographic study of an Indian dance school in Vancouver, British Columbia by Jean Cunningham. Her research questions probed parental expectations of the school for their daughters, and explored what meanings the dance had for the second-generation students. Cunningham concluded that the families

interviewed 'live with, and continually manipulate, respond and adjust to the dual cultural influences in their lives' (1998:290) and that both generations 'sought, and found, some personal meaning in the dance that clarified, or simply validated their own feelings of ethnic identity' (ibid).

Also relevant here are contemporary studies on Asian music that examine aspects of UK Asian ethnicity and identity expressed through musical forms and that 'privilege music as a site of cultural negotiation and change' (Hyder: 2004:5). Rehan Hyder's book *Brimful of Asia. Negotiating Ethnicity on the UK Music Scene* (2005) identifies cultural performance 'as a pivot around which notions of cultural allegiance and ethnic identity were established and negotiated' (2005:5). South Asian cultural identity is discussed too by Rajinder Kumar Dudrah (2002a, b) in relation to British bhangra music and the globalised influences of Zee TV (See also Oliver 1990, Farrell 2005). Dudrah argues that British bhangra music has taken on a political dimension and has become part of minority diaspora struggles which 'cut across internal cleavages of caste, ethnicity, and religion' (2002a:182). Politics, music and new Asian identity are themes that examined in Sanjay Sharma and John Hutnyk's edited book, *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: the Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (1996), with a further emphasis on British bhangra as an essential part of urban Asian UK culture.

Filmi or Bollywood dance features substantially in Nasreen Munni Kabir's Channel Four book *Bollywood – The Indian Cinema story* where interviews with leading directors, actors, choreographers and musicians add to a practical and more intimate picture of the Bombay film industry. Steve Derné (2000), Rachel Dwyer (2000), and Vijay Mishra (2002) all present detailed studies of aspects of Indian popular cinema, but do not focus on the dance element. More comprehensive accounts are found in Sangita Shresthova's article examining second-generation Asian American students' performance of Bollywood dance at their annual university cultural festivals, and in Arundhati Subrahmanyam's chapter in *New Directions in Indian Dance* (Kothari 2003) with a focus entirely on Hindi films. As yet, there is no published analysis of the relationship between

classical dance forms and Bollywood dance, or any comprehensive account that focuses on film dance.

1.4:3 South Asian communities in the UK

Much of the existing literature investigating the South Asian presence in the UK is of a sociological nature. It is work that enquires into the daily life of an immigrant community – the history, settlement patterns, work placements, education, housing, social life, and religious practices, and records the problems of displacement, hostilities and prejudices met and the barriers of language. Some of the research has been ethnographic: Ghazala Bhatti (1999) studied fifty Asian families at home and at school to discover the quotidian experiences of young Asian children attending a popular comprehensive school in the UK, and Robert Jackson and Eleanor Nesbitt (1993) conducted a detailed survey of the lives of young Hindu children in Britain, concentrating mainly on the Hindu community in Coventry. In the latter study, details are recorded of the children's understanding of the *Navratri* autumn festival, with a brief reference to the nature of the dance styles. Penny Logan (1988) also deals with the *Navratri* festival, recording British Hindu children's religious experiences of the festival and their impact on religious education. A further anthropological study was made by Harald Tambs-Lyche (1980) of some of the Patidar (Patel) caste settled in London. Tambs-Lyche lived for a year with an Asian Patidar family, enabling him to observe their way of life, business dealings, family relationships, religious practices and their relationships with other Asians. This allowed him insight into the world of the Gujarati family, and the men's identification with their business lives, as well as the women's commitment to their religious practices.

Other relevant studies concern themselves directly with the Asian community in Leicester. Valerie Marett's detailed account of the story of Ugandan Asians settling in Leicester (1989) looks not only at their expulsion from Uganda in 1972 and troubled journey to the UK, but also the longer-term situation that the Asian society has had to meet. Her account is drawn from extensive interviews in the community and painstaking research in newspapers, government publications, journals, directories and parliamentary

papers. Joseph Seliga (1998), writing from a historical perspective, considers the effects of Indian migration on Belgrave, one of the neighbourhoods of Leicester that was a white, working-class area up to 1965. Now, Belgrave is the very heart of Asian Leicester, hosting six Hindu temples, two Asian community centres and a recreation ground that is the site for *Diwali* and *Dashera* celebrations.²³

The successful and prominent caste of Hindu Gujaratis in Britain has been the subject of much research in recent years. Richard Burghart's edited book *Hinduism in Great Britain* (1987) devotes three of its eleven chapters to aspects of the Gujarati community life and six of the remaining chapters to an examination of the different religious groups attended by British Hindus. Roger Ballard's comprehensive collection of research papers (1994) offers detail and distinctiveness in its re-examination of the way in which the religious and cultural character of the British social order has been transformed as a result of the South Asian presence. This book contains three chapters on UK Gujarati groups in Leeds, London, and a comparison with Gujarat, India. Other British towns, Oxford, Bradford, Coventry and Leicester, are featured as specific analysis is made of their Asian societies; for example the 'Valmikis in Coventry', and the 'Pakistani Community in Oxford', but significantly there is an absence of material on British Tamils in this important volume. The journal *New Community* has carried several articles on the Gujaratis; one by Michael Lyon (1971) dealing with ethnicity, and another by Iris Kalka (1991). Kalka's paper is concerned with the politics of 'community' among Gujaratis in the London Borough of Harrow, and 'delineates the ethnic minorities' ideological premises' (1991:377) in their dealings with the local authority.

Several other books, apart from the collections already discussed, undertake an examination of the general subject of Hinduism in Britain. These publications are part of a large growth in academic research during the last twenty years that has focussed on religious studies, particularly diaspora religions and the relationship between religion and ethnicity. David Bowen's edited *Hinduism in England* (1981) covers subjects as varied as caste, the western context of Hinduism, and Hindu worship in Coventry. Prominent academics working in the Hindu diaspora and whose works have impacted on my study

of Hindu communities in London and Leicester in particular are Kim Knott and Steve Vertovec. Knott's comprehensive monograph (1986) of the religious practices of Hindus in Leeds was followed by her contribution in Bughart's book (1987), and by a paper in Howard Coward et al's book *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada and the United States* (2000a). Her work extends widely too in other publications (2000b, 2004) where she has articulated important theoretical and empirical trajectories in the study of religion and migration. Vertovec has specialised in research on UK Hindu communities from the Caribbean and has examined different types of Hindu temple worship in detail (1989, 1992). He has written too on the social complexities of the multicultural circumstances of Leicester's Asian communities (1994).

Contemporary debates within sociology and social anthropology in the last decade have begun to problematise notions of 'community', 'culture' and concepts of religious and ethnic identity. These issues have been raised in sociological studies on the British Asian communities by Katy Gardner and Abdus Shukur (1994), Jessica Jacobson (1997), Wenonah Lyon (1997), and by Dooleka Raj (2000) who found a growing sense of adherence to multiple identities amongst the young Asians they interviewed. Similarly, Knott (2004), Arjun Appadurai (1996), and Jorg Durrschmidt (1997) have sought to find new terminologies for the troubled concept of 'community', seeking to free it from the confines of locality, ethnicity, politics and religion.

1.4:4 The practice of Hinduism

In addition to the literature already cited on general features of the practice of Hinduism, research that addresses particular aspects of religious worship is most apposite to the work of this thesis. Much of the available literature investigates the relationship of the devotee to the *murti* (image of the deity) and the rituals practised by the priests in temple worship. It is important to note, however, that many of these studies focus on practices in India, and although British temple worship follows many of the same traditions, the changing effects of the diaspora situation need to be acknowledged. The publications of Diana Eck (1998), Richard Davis (1991), and Chris Fuller (1982, 1992) examine in differing ways the experience of meeting the 'divine'. Davis gives a detailed account of

Siva ritual worship in India, both historically and contemporaneously, whilst Eck explains how worshippers experience *darshan*, literally the seeing and being seen by God. Fuller discusses the general practice of Hinduism in India and also presents a detailed picture of ritual worship at the famous Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, India.

Two further important works are salient to the present discussion: one, an edited collection of papers arising out of the 'Conference on Religion in South India' in 1981 and 1982 (Waghorne, J.P and N. Cutler 1985) that discusses image worship and the topic of 'the human and the divine', and M.N. Srinivas' seminal text *Social Change in Modern India* (1968). The latter is a collection of lectures given for the Tagore Memorial at the University of California, Berkeley and although published over thirty years ago, Srinivas' anthropological studies of the caste system and of Sanskritization and westernization in India continue to have an impact today, both in the sub-continent and in Britain.

1.5 The present context: a summary

A short history of the presence of South Asian dance in the UK has been presented to set the scene for the discussion of Hindu community dance practices. This history is examined in the context of the British government's policies for support for the arts, impacting heavily as it does on both the staged performances of South Asian dance and its community expression. The accessibility projects of the Arts Council and their political basis are discussed, revealing the effects of funding of South Asian arts in the UK over several decades. The current climate of 'cultural diversity' funding appears to be enabling more community arts projects, including dance and South Asian dance, to be generated and supported.

An examination of the history of British South Asian dance and the funding tensions experienced by today's professional and community South Asian dancers are set against the discourse of the *devadasis*, and the parallels of their practices and current dance performances have been discussed. This has revealed a contested situation full of ambiguities and paradoxes where elements of *devadasi* practice continue to be embedded

in current praxis, despite historical attempts to distance the dance practices from their *devadasi* roots.

A survey of the existing literature related to the themes analysed in this research reveals a wealth of publications in specific areas and a dearth in others. The South Asian community in Britain has been the subject of detailed sociological and some anthropological research, and much of this writing focuses on Gujarati Hindu society; however, very little, if any, has concentrated on the UK Tamil Hindus. This indicates a lack that needs addressing, and it is hoped that this particular research project will make an advance in that direction. Various themes relating to South Asian dance practices in the UK have been examined in recent years, as shown, but these have not addressed aspects of cultural identity and transmission of culture which forms part of the subject of this research. Finally, the recent scholarship in dance ethnography displays a 'richly varied terrain' (Buckland 1999:9) and this excursion into the field of expressions of faith through dance in Hindu communities will seek to dig deeper into that fertile seam.

Part 1 of the text continues in Chapter Two by examining the theoretical constructs of the central themes of the thesis – issues of community, identity, tradition and innovation, and those related to religion and faith – viewed through the lens of Hindu community dance practices. How do forms of movement and dance challenge or confirm perceptions of identity? How is tradition maintained, and for what purposes? What part does religious identity play in performance of dance? Are these practices in fact, performances of faith? Chapter Two seeks to address these questions from a theoretical point of view.

Notes:

¹ A French corruption from the Portuguese word 'bailadeira' meaning female dancer. It was used to signify a Hindu temple-dancing girl. See Guest 1986:39 and Yule and Burnell 1996 [1886]:75.

² Descriptions of the performances of these *devadasis* are given by Théophile Gautier in *La Presse* 1838 (translated by Ivor Guest 1986, pp 39-50).

³ A corruption from the Hindi word *nach* meaning dance, originally from Sanskrit *natya* (dance/drama). It became a catchall term used by westerners for all types of Indian dance, which glossed over the distinctions of specific forms. (See Coorlawala 1992:130 and Yule and Burnell 1996 [1886]: 620.

⁴ See David 2001:54. Information in this paragraph taken from the archives of the Theatre Museum, London (printed programmes of 1886). For further reading on the Great Exhibitions, see Greenhalgh 1988.

⁵ During research for my MA dissertation (2001) and for the SADiB project (2001), I examined and analysed all available editions from 1910-2000 of the two prominent dance magazines published during this period, *The Dancing Times* and *Ballet* magazine, for reviews pertaining to Indian dance or interpretive 'oriental' dance. This was the conclusion drawn from the little evidence available.

⁶ For further discussion of this phenomenon, see David 2001:29-32, 66-71.

⁷ Personal communication with Pam Turner, August 2000, who attended these performances.

⁸ See South Asian dance reviews in *The Dancing Times* 1950-1959, researched by this author for the SADiB project (endnote 15).

⁹ In 1994, the Arts Council of Great Britain was sub-divided into three main bodies, named as the Arts Council of England (ACE), the Scottish Arts Council and the Arts Council of Wales. They were set up as autonomous bodies, directly responsible to their respective Secretary of State. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland was already established as a separate body.

¹⁰ The National Lottery, a commercial gambling scheme, was started in 1994 by the then Conservative government. It was specifically designed to create funds for contribution to charitable causes as a supplement to government subsidies and had both economic and social objectives. A government license was granted to a private consortium, Camelot Group PLC, to run the scheme.

¹¹ The Labour government came to power in 1997 after eighteen years of Conservative rule.

¹² Jeyasingh's high level of funding has attracted many criticisms from other artists over the years. One well-known, London-based, classical performer of Kathak spoke at a dance discussion day in Leicester (2004) of her own pioneering work to develop South Asian dance in the UK over a period of 30 years, and of how little funding she had received despite numerous grant applications. She had calculated that Jeyasingh had received over 3.5 million pounds (UK) in funding over 16 years. This particular dancer had in fact been told by the Arts Council after one failed grant application not to use the term 'traditional' in her application.

¹³ Sampad's Arts Council funding for 2005/6 is £228,910, a major increase in three years.

¹⁴ The numbers given on the Federation of Patidar Association's website (www.patidars.org) in

August 2004 are as follows: 60 students learning Kathak; 19 students learning Bharatanatyam; 52 learning folk and modern dance, and 16 learning Bollywood dance.

¹⁵ The SADiB report (South Asian Dance in Britain: Negotiating Cultural Identity through Dance, 2002) was written at the end of a two-year research project (July 1999-July 2001) and funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The project examined the role played by South Asian dance in Britain and was directed, and the report written by dance anthropologist Dr Andrée Grau, Reader in Dance at Roehampton University.

¹⁶ Traditional authority speaks of Brahma, the creator in Hindu mythology, giving the dance as a gift to man for his entertainment and his salvation. Siva, the third God of the sacred trilogy, is said to be Nataraj, King of the dance, and he dances the cosmic dance of the creation. This form of dance is thought to have developed in the temples of south India, in Tamil Nadu, as Bharatanatyam and was part of ritual worship. New dance scholarship has challenged the monolithic definition of tradition within the Bharatanatyam technique, and has questioned the uncritical, idealised accounts of the history of the dance. Scholars such as Srinivasan (1983, 1985), Allen (1997) and O'Shea (1998) have examined in detail the recent 're-construction' of South Indian dance, and offer a new dialogue in this debate.

¹⁷ Kersenboom, writing of her dance training by a traditional temple-dancer (1991), traces the dancer's family back for four generations of *devadasis* to the early 1800s.

¹⁸ Much has been written about the reinvention or revival of Bharatanatyam in the 1930s in India (see endnote 17). Rukmini Devi played a central role in the revival, changing the content of the dance, the costumes, the training and the performance to establish a nationalist, respectable, middle-class dance style suitable for young women.

¹⁹ *Rasa* literally means 'juice, essence' and is used to indicate mood, or the essence of an artistic experience. In the *devadasi* tradition, *sringara rasa* (romantic or erotic love) expresses *bhakti*, devotion or love for God. 'Its ultimate goal is realized through ecstatic union with god... The nature of *bhakti*, the appropriate metaphor for it and the symbolic language (*abhinaya*) used to express it, have been the subject of vigorous debate within the south Indian dance community for over fifty years' (Gaston 1996:87). See also Susan Schwartz's book entitled *Rasa* (2004) and the work of Phillip Zarrilli (1990, 1998, 2000).

²⁰ Gaston points out (1996:336) that worship of Siva is a more recent phenomenon by today's dancers. *Devadasis* would worship the main deity of their temple where they were dedicated.

²¹ The Dravidian movement, a political force fighting for an independent Tamil state in south India, became the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) in 1944; a later off-shoot of this party was the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) which continued in the 1950s. They were anti-Brahmin, anti-north India and anti-Aryan.

²² See Chapter Six, endnote 4.

²³ *Dashera* – The tenth and final day of the *Navratri* celebrations which acknowledges the triumph of good over evil. Some Hindu communities (including in Leicester) burn a huge effigy of the demon king Ravana, acknowledging his defeat by the hero Rama (see Jackson and Nesbitt 1993; Flood 2002).

CHAPTER TWO: A Theoretical Frame

Themes of community, identity, tradition and innovation together with the topics of faith and religion weave themselves repeatedly through the ethnographic fieldwork of this research, revealing a rich and multi-layered cloth of South Asian socio-cultural expression. This chapter explores the complex, layered and sometimes contradictory issues of ethnic, cultural and religious identity from a theoretical viewpoint, as well as examining the contested and shifting concepts of tradition and innovation. I begin with the recurring theme of the question of identity and present both a diachronic and a synchronic analysis of the cultural, ethnic and religious strands of the sense of a public and private self.

2.1 Negotiating identity

We have also been – for a variety of reasons, political more than cultural –forced into categories that don’t always fit. I remember Stuart Hall telling me how we had no sense of being Caribbean until we came to this place. We were Jamaican or Trinidadian, and it was only when we came here that we became ‘Caribbean’. I think it is similar for Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians who became Asian because that’s the way Britain is.

Younge 2003:19

Identity’s double implication – that of uniqueness and that of sameness - and the questions of how people are categorised and how they form their own self-ascription, are essential factors that require unpicking in today’s ‘crisis of identity’ (Hall 1994: 274) experienced by many diaspora groups. As Rehan Hyder argues, the nature of identity ‘comes not only from within an individual, from memories and history, but is worked out and negotiated in the big wide world outside’ (2004:1). Gary Younge, the *Guardian*’s New York correspondent, discussing the diaspora context at the Arts Council conference *Connecting Flights: New cultures of the diaspora* (London, November 2002), cited above, refers to the political categorisation of people under the false umbrella of ‘culture’, and indicates how cultural and ethnic identity is often confused. Younge highlights the hegemonic use of conflated, ambiguous labels such as ‘Asian’, ‘African’ and ‘Caribbean’ rather than terms that specify exact origin and cultural background.

Richard Ings, writing the introduction to the conference report also argues that ‘there is still a need for multiple identities to be recognised and valued’ (2003: 3). The complexity of this particular research field interrogating Hindu community dance practices traverses the boundaries of ethnicity, religious affiliation and cultural expression, and reveals the ambiguities at play within a multi-racial society.

2.2 *Ethnicity and ethnic identity*

My allegiance is to the UN [United Nations], which seems to be logical
because ethnically I’m filthy and extremely proud of it.

Ustinov 2004:n.p

Actor, writer and social commentator Peter Ustinov’s allusion to his rich background of Russian, Ethiopian, German, French and Swiss blood satirises the concept of a multi-racial ethnicity. His humour raises the issue of how people are not only categorised by the term ‘ethnic’, but are alienated too by the use of such a term by the host community.

The word ethnicity is a relatively new construct which became a popular term in the late 1960s/early 1970s, and was first recorded in the USA in 1953. It did not appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* until 1972 (in a supplement) (Brah 1996:162). Ethnicity became an important concept within anthropological theory and has become central to discourses of race and nation, incorporating as it does the word ‘ethnic’. Anthony Smith defines an ethnic community as:

a social group whose members share a sense of common origins,
claim a common and distinctive history and destiny, possess one
or more distinctive characteristics, and feel a sense of collective
uniqueness and solidarity.

Smith 1981:66

This description refers not only to the cultural traits and elements of a community, but also focuses on the shared characteristics of a particular group and their common ancestry. This creates a simultaneous sense of inclusion (for those members who share these features) and exclusion (of all those who do not). Fredrik Barth (1969) famously describes ethnicity as primarily a mechanism of boundary maintenance between groups. In this sense, ethnicity becomes a strategy whereby one group asserts its distinctiveness in opposition to another, making use of language, shared history, cultural practices such

as dance and music, and religion to do so. Barth's theory is now critiqued by post-modern paradigms that see ethnicity as a flexible and multiple tool, and that view perceptions of 'boundary' and 'group' as fixed and single (Barnard and Spencer 1998:192). As further discussion in this chapter reveals, fieldwork from this research and other studies show that both aspects of ethnic identity are currently to be discerned –that of reinforcing boundaries and distinctiveness, and that of 'ever-shifting concepts of self and belonging' (Hyder 2004:3).

The concept of ethnicity, like identity, offers two differing perceptions: how an ethnic group perceives itself, and how others view it. These factors often become part of political debate when notions of 'race relations' and 'minority issues' are introduced. In fact some commentators argue that the use of the term 'ethnicity' perpetuates old distinctions of race (Ballard 1997, Mattausch 2000). For example, 'in Britain, the term "ethnic minorities" is used to refer primarily to non-white immigrants' (Guibernau and Rex 1997:4), whereas the larger population of Irish, or Polish immigrants do not see themselves, and are not generally seen by others, as ethnic at all (Alibhai-Brown 2001b:112; Dale and Holdsworth 1997). The 'Asian ethnic community' or the 'Asian minority' are labels imposed from the outside, often from government sources, and show how the concept of ethnicity has 'come to exert a powerful political function' (Ashcroft et al 1998:83). Ethnicity as a category first appeared in the 1991 UK Census, but the presence and formulation of such a question have been open to much debate (Ballard 1997, Dale and Holdsworth 1997). Ballard argues that by offering in the census the possibility of ticking a box that states 'White', or six pre-set other ethno-national categories (Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese), it reinforces

the popular view that ethnicity is solely a characteristic of exotic non-white others. Secondly, and even more seriously, it both confirms and legitimates the (majority) view that 'ethnic' is both a convenient and an appropriate euphemism for people of colour.

Ballard 1997:194

Nowadays, implications of 'other' and 'minority' are common in the use of ethnic as a description of a group as opposed to the dominant group or dominant culture. The term

has gained further negative associations too with the phrase ‘ethnic cleansing’, first used in eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, in Rwanda in 1994 and at other sites of ethnic conflict.¹ The sense of ethnicity as a positive feeling of belonging within a cultural group appears to have now been subsumed by these more recent connotations (see later discussion in this chapter on the negative associations for young Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims of the term ‘Asian’ as a category of ethnic identity).

Ketu Katrak’s study of Bharatanatyam dance in Southern California has led her to question how ethnicity is inhabited in the physical body that performs the dance, and she notes how it ‘is represented differently by first-and second-generation Indo-Americans’ (2001:14), as in India, there is no need to display one’s Indian ethnicity. She comments too that overt presentations of religiosity in the dance are in fact attempts to show such ethnicity – an ethnicity that frames the performer in a nationalist Indian identity, superior ‘in comparison to American culture, which is after all not as ancient as India’s’ (ibid:25). Katrak notes too that for many second-generation dance students Bharatanatyam is the vehicle to learn about Indian culture, and that it still remains a carrier ‘to inculcate and instill certain traditional values about womanhood and the conventionally acceptable roles of wife and mother’ (ibid:5).

2.3 Cultural identity

For many immigrant Hindu groups the concept of cultural identity is directly linked with ethnic identity. A number of South Asian performers, choreographers and writers have interrogated the idea of their own “ethnic” identity, attempting in their work in the expressive arts to comprehend and communicate the complex and often ambiguous sense of who they are and where they belong. Some have coined new terminologies in this endeavour: Jatinda Verma, playwright and director, writing an analysis of multi-cultural productions proposed the term ‘Binglish’, a word appropriated from contemporary Singaporeans’ description of their spoken language ‘Singlish’. He explained:

I use it to suggest a form of spoken English as much as a process: Asian and Black life in modern Britain is self-evidently ‘not-quite English’; and, equally, is characterised by a striving to –and at times an insistence upon- ‘be English’.

Verma 2001:1

Verma's production of a *Journey to the West*, a play charting the lives and backgrounds of young British-born Asians, cleverly coined the terms of 'multi-culti', and a 'hyphenated breed' to describe the leading character who is part-Muslim, part-Hindu, part-Indian and part-British.²

Sanjoy Roy, in his examination of the urban siting of contemporary Indian dance and its relationship to migration, uses the term 'double consciousness' to denote the awareness of belonging to two cultures at once.³ He explains, 'it is also the paradoxical sense of being inside and outside at the same time, what I shall call "inexclusion"' (Roy 1997: 72). Choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh has famously spoken of her multi-layered background (Christian, Tamil, Malaysian, Indian), describing how 'my heritage...has been mixed as subtly as a samosa has mixed itself into the English cuisine' (1998: 48). Her contemporary dance-making seeks to be freed from any misconceived external labelling of ethnic identity and at the same time strives to deconstruct the segregations and myths of east versus west.⁴ She vehemently challenges the simplistic use of terms such as "hybridity" and "East-West collaborations" as descriptions of her work, terminology also denounced by Roy (1997:81) and dancer Vena Ramphal (2002:18). Salman Rushdie adds his voice to the debate, describing the sense of finding himself constantly in a minority group – a Muslim in India, an immigrant in Pakistan and Asian in Britain - thus: 'Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools' (1992:15). The title of his collected short stories, *East, West* (1994) exemplifies this point, writes Susheila Nasta:

Importantly, too, the *East* and *West* of the title of the collection are not divided, or hyphenated; they are placed side by side as *simultaneous* realities existing in different and sometimes parallel temporal and spatial locations, not either/or, but both – separated only by a pause, a comma.

Nasta 2002:133

Nasta argues that Rushdie sees himself as that comma, or alternatively, the comma represents the space where he lives. Rushdie's proposal is that living simultaneously in two cultures can be used to advantage in nourishing the creative intellect. He believes that he and other Indian writers in Britain have access not only to their own history and

traditions, but to a second tradition that is ‘the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group’ (Rushdie 1992:20).⁵

Jeyasingh too seeks recognition for her unique choreographic art, not as an ‘Asian’, an ‘Indian’, or ‘a Bharatanatyam dancer and choreographer’, and therefore her dance work deliberately does not promote the classical Bharatanatyam style. Whilst she, Rushdie and many others rebel against a cultural labelling, there are South Asian dance artists and teachers in the UK who, along with a great majority of their own communities, perceive the classical status of music and dance to be an essential part of their tradition and their cultural life. Their work seeks above all else to preserve their tradition. Questionnaires and interviews during this research with dancers and teachers reveal a belief that cultural identity is confirmed through the learning of classical South Asian dance styles, and that the dance forms are vehicles for expressing their own Hindu religious faith and devotion. Some of the younger people questioned however - some second, some third generation - who have grown-up in the UK, gave mixed responses to questions about the place of South Asian dance in relation to their sense of identity. The results of these questionnaires are discussed and analysed in subsequent chapters.

2.4 Problematising ‘culture’

The concept of culture has a complex history and its contemporary usage accords with Raymond Williams’s view that ‘Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’ (Williams 1988:87). A distinct development in its meaning occurred at the time of the Enlightenment and with the growth of the Romantic movement, where culture began to be understood in the plural, i.e. cultures – and which referred to the distinct ways of life of various groups, communities and nations.

This sense was widely developed, in the Romantic movement, as an alternative to the orthodox and dominant ‘*civilisation*’. It was first used to emphasize national and traditional cultures, including the new concept of **folk-culture**.

Williams 1988:89

This latter view of pluralistic and relativistic cultures has been central in anthropology and other social sciences, superseding the “humanistic” sense of culture, which is singular and evaluative: in this latter sense, culture is what a person *ought* to acquire in

order to become a fully worthwhile moral agent' (Barnard and Spencer 1998:136). This was followed by the rise and subsequent demise, in the later part of the twentieth century, of the concept of culture as a matter of symbols and meanings, of culture as a signifying practice (see Geertz 1973, White 1975, and Schneider 1968). In recent times, anthropologists, perhaps in a 'crisis of anthropological confidence' (Barnard and Spencer 1998:141) have problematised the term 'culture', and attempted to abandon it 'in favour of apparently less problematic terms like "hegemony" or "discourse" ' (ibid:141).

The understanding of culture defined as 'high culture' with distinct class overtones, emerged from eighteenth century idealism and still retains a powerful influence. While those working in the social sciences now shy away from the term, conversely in public life, the use of culture as synonymous with the arts has come into widespread use.

'**Culture** is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film... sometimes with the addition of philosophy, scholarship, history' (Williams 1988:90). This also has led to a distinction between 'high culture' and 'popular culture' where an evaluative and perhaps pejorative view is often taken – the implication of course being that some arts are finer and of higher value than others. Political appropriation of the word 'culture' by policy makers is also in evidence, as indicated by the establishment by the Labour government of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 1997.⁶ Right-wing politicians have also made use of the term to talk about nationalism –the most famous speech and often-cited of these belonging to Tory party Chairman Norman Tebbit.⁷ Susan Wright, discussing the politicisation of 'culture', emphasises this point, stating how:

the New Right appropriated the new ideas of 'culture' from cultural studies, anti-racism and to a lesser extent social anthropology, and engaged in a process of contesting and shifting meanings of 'culture', 'nation', 'race' and 'difference'. They mobilized 'culture' to reinforce exclusion, using it as a euphemism for renewed racism, with profound implications for public policy and people's lives.
Wright 1998:11

Political debates in the UK in the autumn of 2002 and spring of 2003 centred on new approaches to British citizenship and included discussions on immigration, asylum and community relations. Draft proposals for a new citizenship test and citizenship ceremonies were unveiled by the Labour Home Secretary, David Blunkett, who caused a

furore over his comments that British Asians should speak English in their own homes in order 'to participate in wider modern culture'.⁸ In Leicester, Asian residents reacted strongly to this suggestion:

'I think David Blunkett is being ridiculous' said Liakath Ullah, now a grandfather, who came to Britain when he was 26. 'We all recognise the importance of English because it is the language of the world, but we must also respect our own language that is our culture. We must not forget it.'

Wright 2002: n.p.

Cited in *The Times* article above, Mr Ullah revealed that he spoke English, Bengali and Hindi fluently and that his grandchildren were growing up with all these languages in addition to the French or German they were also learning at school. 'We should try and learn as many languages as possible' he added.

Many commentators⁹ have responded to this governmental initiative by criticising the dissemination of apparently mixed messages – on the one hand celebrating the fact that Britain is a multicultural, multi-faith society where 'cultural diversity' has become the political 'buzz' word and is the message of the government's policy on arts funding – and on the other implying that people's native languages should not be used in their own homes. As BBC journalist Dominic Casciani questions, was Blunkett referring

to Britain's settled ethnic minorities communities, now into their third generation of British-born citizens? Or was he referring to the new waves of immigration formed by asylum seekers? Do his comments apply to Welsh and Scots Gaelic speakers?

Casciani 2002:2

Controversy (January 2005) raged also over new Home Office immigration rules, made effective from August 2004, which required all ministers of religion entering the UK to demonstrate a reasonable level of fluency in the English language in order to gain a visa for entry. It seems this was introduced to screen Islamic fundamentalist preachers, but it has affected adversely the running of many Hindu temples, including the major *Swaminarayan* temple in Neasden, north London. This Hindu temple like many others often employs priests from India to conduct temple rituals, and many of these priests do not have the level of fluency in English that is required by the Home Office. Officials at

the temple have stated that these priests do not teach and are simply needed for the ritual activities, and are calling for an exception to the new regulations.¹⁰

The political appropriation of aspects of culture and ethnicity is emphasised too by Avtar Brah who notes that 'the presence of Asians and other blacks in this country has added a new dimension to discussions about "culture", "politics" and "identity" (1996:17).¹¹

Clearly there is no single, correct definition of culture. Brah, discussing the concept of identity in a diasporic situation, refers to the group/community's history as an essential part of their culture.

In broad terms, culture may be viewed as the symbolic construction of the vast array of a social group's life experiences. Culture is the embodiment, the chronicle of a group's history. Since the group histories of different sections of society differ in important ways, their 'cultures' are correspondingly different.

Brah 1996:18

The adhesion to the group's past is clearly observable in the first and many second generation Hindu families, where there is a striving to re-create aspects of familiar socio-cultural conditions of the homeland in their patterns of worship, transmission of traditions and mythology, and education of the children in cultural forms of music, dance, language and religion. The classical dance form of Bharatanatyam and its additional rituals (such as *arangetrams*) have become forms of cultural identity marking for the Tamil Hindu diasporic community (see Chapter Five). Roy confirms this point, stating that:

Classical Indian dance may, and often does, fulfil a 'community' function by providing Indian migrants with a positive sense of belonging, not only by symbolising a valorised heritage to which they can lay claim, but also by providing occasions at which they can meet in an 'Indian' context, where a sense of community and identity can be participated in, constructed and affirmed.

Roy 1997:74

Other writers note the fluidity of identity related to culture and community. Gerd Baumann's work on identity with multi-ethnic groups in Southall, west London revealed how the meaning of 'identity' was entirely subject to context. The way that the Asian Southall residents viewed each other and themselves was not as often the dominant discourse proclaims, equating community, culture and ethnic identity, but where '*culture*

and *community* could be equated in some contexts, but were not the same in others' (Baumann 1996:6).

2.5 Shifts in cultural and ethnic identity

Identity, then, is simultaneously subjective and social, and is constituted in and through culture. Indeed, culture and identity are inextricably linked concepts.

Brah 1996:21

Asian actress and writer Meera Syal, describing her upbringing in the West Midlands, has commented that many Asians in the UK live in 'a sort of immigrant bubble', a bubble that has become a type of time-warp in comparison to their compatriots in India. 'They have no hang-ups in this way in India – they have moved on. Bangalore is like silicone-chip city' she remarked.¹² Indeed, she uses the term 'cultural schizophrenics' to describe her generation. The clinging to traditional practices and ways of life by first-generation migrants is a common pattern in diaspora groups, evidenced not only in this research, but also in previous research carried out in Polish communities living in London and the Yugo-Swedish community in Stockholm.¹³ It is also clear however that the Hindu communities under consideration in this research are at a crucial point of change. This is most evident with the Gujaratis, who have been well established in Britain since the early 1970s and some a decade earlier. Thirty to forty years of residency in the UK, firstly marked by efforts for financial survival, then by the successful establishment of their communities, and followed for some by very prosperous business lives,¹⁴ have brought significant changes to their social and cultural life. Second and third generations are beginning to emerge who appear to have no strong ties to the homeland (India and East Africa), and who see themselves as British, British Hindu or British Asian, straddling both cultures and bound by neither. There is a growing sense among the young of participating in a 'global youth culture' (Saldanha 2002:340) and of having a 'global identity' (ibid: 345) rather than simply being individuals bound to their own or their ancestors' maternal homes. The impact of globalisation with its factors of increased ease of travel and ease of communication influences their cultural and social lives, and often contributes to a sense of discontentment if they are required to follow the more traditional lives of their parents.

These young people, rather than experiencing the stress of living between two conflicting cultures, appear to have developed what commentators have described as a 'multiple cultural competence' (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:175), enabling them to move with ease between home and school, east and west, and tradition and change. Modes of behaviour are modified to suit the particular context, and 'most young Asians are very skilled at doing just this' writes Ballard (1982:196). Wenonah Lyon's ethnographic study of a multi-ethnic community theatre group in Oldham, Greater Manchester, reveals how the British Asian members of the group identified themselves by different names at different times - a use of assorted multiple identities to suit the requirements of specific situations. At times, they would stress their religious affiliation such as British Muslim, or just Muslim, British Hindu or Hindu, but in other contexts they might choose the terms Asian or Pakistani. Lyon notes that the classifications they used included 'Asians, British, black, white, by area of origin... by subregion within the area of origin...by religion...or language' (1997:187). This way of classifying oneself and others, a naming of ethnicity, demonstrates Barth's definition of ethnicity as 'the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others (1969:13). A similar response to the concept of being 'British' was found by Les Back in his ethnographic studies of young working-class black and white groups in London. This study examined 'new and challenging forms of cultural practice and identity formation that had been produced within metropolitan contexts' (Back 1996:3). Some respondents were content with the terms 'Black' and 'British' as an indicator of their identity; others had abandoned the notion of Britishness entirely. For many of the black young people, the islands of origin of their parents featured as an important aspect of their 'new ethnicity'. Other black youngsters spoke what Back (ibid: 8) terms a 'harmony discourse', describing how colour was of no importance to them, and how everyone on the housing estate integrated freely. Back comments that the youths' description was of 'a place where people can move in and out of different kinds of self-presentation' (ibid: 8), as they willed (see also Eade 1997b).

2.6 Concepts of faith and religion

The self-ascription of identity often makes use of a person's religious affiliation, as shown above, therefore I now examine how perceptions and conceptions of religion and faith relate to identity and to a sense of ethnicity.

Relations between ethnicity and religion remain paradoxical. They are sometimes separate, at other times overlapping and, often, equated.
Raj 2000:538

Studies carried out in the 1990s reveal evidence that religious commitment amongst the young is becoming a more meaningful part of identity than ethnicity (Jacobson 1997) and this is discussed in detail below.

In order to consider the meaning of religious adherence and its place in this ethnographic study of Hindu dance practices in a religious context, the terms 'religion' and 'faith' require further interrogation. Gavin Flood argues that 'what we understand by Hinduism as a religion partly depends upon what we mean by "religion"' (2002:8), and proposes that our western notion of religion has 'developed out of a Christian, largely Protestant, understanding, which defines it in terms of belief' (ibid.). Hinduism for example, is based far more upon practice than upon belief; how a Hindu acts is ultimately more important than what he or she believes, a fact that stresses the social and cultural constructs of being Hindu (see Chapter Four). David Gellner, writing on religion, politics and ritual, suggests that the category of religion needs to be deconstructed if understanding is to move away from the Judaeo- Christian construct of the term. He proposes that

it should be replaced by a hierarchy of (at least) three types of religion. First comes soteriology or salvation religion. Second is social or communal religion...Third, there is instrumental religion, the attempt to make specific things happen within the world. It will be noted that this approach does not define religion in terms of belief, but in terms of what is done; and it distinguishes between the different purposes for which different kinds of religious actions are done.

Gellner 1999:142

Hinduism is classified in Gellner's system as 'essentially a social religion which has numerous alternative soteriologies within it, so that many people have doubted whether it should be considered a single religion at all' (ibid:144). Fiona Bowie warns too of

categorising religion mainly in structures ‘based upon European languages and cultures’ (2000:22) which bear no relationship or have no equivalent in certain societies in other parts of the world.

There are similar problems with the term ‘faith’. When used in a religious sense, it is understood to carry the meaning of reliance or belief in religious doctrines; or it may simply indicate a whole-hearted belief in something or someone. The two terms, faith (or belief) and religion are commonly used interchangeably, ‘faith’ being inserted as a synonym for ‘religion’, and vice versa. I make no apology for knowingly doing likewise. Therefore this research utilises the concept of ‘performing faith’ to interrogate the ways that Hindu devotees express their religious beliefs in their dance practices. Indeed, Donald Lopez, writing on the topic of ‘belief’, notes that Christians have tended to describe what we now know as ‘world religions’ (e.g. Hinduism, Islam) ‘from the perspective of belief’ (1998:21), adding that anthropologists and scholars of religion have too ‘defined religion in terms of *belief* or perhaps *beliefs and practices*, those deeds motivated by belief’ (ibid.). There may be, however, a discrepancy between people’s personal system of faith and the official view or theory of their religion.

In the sixteenth century, the word ‘religion’ acquired its modern meaning of a system of faith and worship that recognises a superhuman power or a commitment to God. Victor and Edith Turner note how the term speaks of the two spheres of the social (human beings and deities) and public (beliefs and practices), and of a systematic form (1982b: 201). The social nature of religion was earlier explored by Emile Durkheim, who, as a symbolist, saw religion not only as having its basis in the social group, but also as an expression of the social values of the society. Durkheim drew a distinction between what is sacred and what is profane, defining religion as a ‘unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things’ (1964 [1915]:37). This interpretation when applied to Hinduism remains inadequate, as it does not encompass the essential fluidity and importance of the concepts sacred and profane in Hindu thought. What is treated as sacred on one day, such as a temporary sculpture of a deity, may be discarded in the river the next day when its function has ceased, and prior to being empowered by the deity the sculpture would

have had no sacred power. The sacredness of an object, event or person is entirely dependent on the context. Mary Douglas (2002 [1966]: 50) contests Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane, noting how categories of pollution and purity cannot be neatly divided between the two, as they occur simultaneously and in opposition to each other. Both the sacred and the profane are seen by Douglas as part of the same ordering system.

Durkheim's social view of religion had a major impact on anthropological thought, and was influential in the development in anthropology of a symbolist approach to the understanding of religion. Symbolism demonstrates how a community's symbols and rituals stand as a metaphor for its social and cultural life, and in the case of religion, for what those symbols represent. Although Clifford Geertz 'found little to admire in Durkheim' (Barfield 1997:214), he does acknowledge that Durkheim's discussion of the nature of the sacred remained an important starting point for an anthropological theory of religion. Geertz's symbolic approach to religion is perhaps one of the most influential in anthropology today. He famously describes religion as:

a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Geertz 1973:90

Geertz explains how he uses the multivalent word 'symbol' to represent 'any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for conception' (ibid), but adds too that definitions are a mixed blessing. At worst they do nothing; at best, if used carefully, they can guide and develop a genuine line of questioning. It is worth noting here that this interpretation of religion by Geertz omits the acknowledgement of a supernatural power, or a form of God, yet he does write additionally of the 'notion that religion tunes human actions to an envisaged cosmic order and projects images of cosmic order onto the plane of human experience' (ibid). Sklar adds her own interpretation of Geertz's definition of religion, suggesting 'that it is not the symbols that produce "powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations" (Geertz, ibid), but rather people's participation with symbols' (Sklar 2001a: 213), a point I would argue that is relevant to the present

research. The symbols utilised in the worship of the deities in the Hindu temple are not only physical expressions of the community's faith, those very symbols actually enable worship to proceed. In use, they are essential ingredients for 'communion' or *darshan*. The symbolic forms of the deities are believed to have been given life and engaged with as living beings. The power invested in the symbols of worship is directly reflected in the dance practices – in specific movements and in particular hand gestures – which originate from the *devadasi* temple dancers and their ritual practice.

Despite Geertz's formidable influence, his work on religion and ritual has drawn various criticisms. Talal Asad questions Geertz's symbolic approach, suggesting that it proffers 'a distanced spectator-role' (1983:239) rather than one of social inclusion. Asad argues that this gives rise to an understanding of religion that is 'isolated from social practices and discourses, and regarded primarily in terms of consciousness' (ibid) and that overlooks the issues of power and authority. David Gellner's more recent critique (1999) comments that Geertz did not pay sufficient attention to the contestation of power in ritual practice, nor did he go far enough in considering the effects of colonialism in his analysis of his fieldwork. Gellner disagrees with Geertz's theory of a universal, ahistorical understanding of both religion and ritual practices, and others have noted how 'it ignores the genealogy of the modern Western understanding of religion' (Veer, van der 1998:482).

Religious experience can be found commonly in ritual action, and anthropologists frequently call religious practices 'ritual'. It is beyond the scope of the present thesis to examine the many definitions of ritual, except to acknowledge that in relation to the two South Asian communities investigated here, ritual action forms a significant part of their religious practices where dance plays its own important part. Trance or possessed dance, as described in Chapter Five is an essential part of the ritual during the Hindu festival of *Tai Pusam*.

2.7 Religious identity – a site of contestation and change

Religion has always been one potential aspect in defining a person's identity, as well as language, ancestry and social practices (Geertz 1973), but sociological studies in the last decade indicate 'a growing tendency to emphasize a distinction between religion and ethnicity as sources of identity' (Jacobson 1997:239). Jacobson's research amongst young British Pakistanis who questioned their sense of religious and ethnic identity found that 'the former plays a more significant part than the latter in their lives' (ibid: 239). Her respondents' religious adherence to Islam was central to their lives and therefore to their identity, and was viewed more as a global allegiance than a national one, that is to Pakistan or Britain (see also Gardner and Shukur, 1994). This is one of the factors that has created a new appeal for commitment amongst the young to Islam, as Jacobson specifies:

For many of them, Islam's teachings are a source of precise and coherent guidance which enables them to rise above the uncertainties of existence in a world which they perceive as comprising two cultures.

Jacobson 1997:254

Jacobson argues too that although these religious boundaries have become more explicit and more clearly defined amongst the young, simultaneously the 'boundaries defining expressions of ethnic identity are semi-permeable' (ibid: 247) and are revealed in their mixed friendships, their sense of Britain being their home, and a liking for 'western' culture.

The religious revivalism amongst young people, particularly from ethnic backgrounds, is noted by Katy Gardner and Abdus Shukur in their studies of young British Bengalis (1994), and by Dhooleka Raj in his anthropological work with London-based student Hindu activists (2000). Their evidence suggests that religious revivalism is becoming a more meaningful aspect of identity than ethnicity. Raj discovered 'that the development of an explicit *Hindutva*¹⁵ identity among Hindu students is related to their experiences of being an ethnic minority in Britain' (2000:536). At the time of Raj's research, students were being actively encouraged to abandon the term Asian, and see themselves solely as Hindus. A lecture rather provocatively titled *Who the hell do you think you are?* was

given at various student campuses during 1994-95 by young male Hindus, described here by Raj:

His talk addresses issues of citizenship, belonging, culture, colour, identity and religion. Its main objective was to separate out a viable Hindu identity in the light of modern multiculturalist identity politics.

Raj 2000:544

Despite the religiosity of the concept “Hindu”, these lectures promoted a way of life that was specifically a *Hindu* way of life, with the implication of Hindu as a social and cultural notion rather than a religious one. When young people identify themselves as Asian, or Indian, they are viewed as non-natives of the UK even if their birth- place was the UK. Being Asian in Britain not only carries negative associations, but it effectively collapses all distinction of background, language and religion, and is therefore more widely rejected now than previously. It is perhaps worth noting here that the official term for immigrants, in use from the early 1900s and only abandoned in 1970, was ‘aliens’.

As discussed earlier in relation to the terminology “South Asian dance”, the term Asian is itself problematic, as it has no consistent use worldwide.

In the USA, the term by and large refers to people from Japan, Korea, China and Vietnam. People who trace their ancestry back to the Indian sub-continent tend to be categorized as ‘Indian’ or ‘East Indian’...In the British context, in popular parlance the term ‘Asian’ has come to specify immigrants from the Indian sub-continent.

Sharma et al 1996:218

Sensitivities after the terrorist attacks on New York on September 11th 2001 (hereafter 9/11) have also caused tensions with the use of the word Asian. *Sunrise Radio*, a leading UK radio station for ethnic groups decided to ban the use of the term from its news bulletins, as listeners were keen for the station to differentiate between different religions and countries of origin.¹⁶ Verma, discussing the term in a BBC Radio 4 programme¹⁷, revealed how ‘Asian’ was a term invented by empire builders in 1948 in colonial Kenya, keen to have a catch-all term that did not perpetuate the Hindu/Muslim divide exacerbated by partition in 1947. The term was then imported to Britain in 1968 when the first exodus of Indians occurred and it became a convenient label for the British authorities to use. Before then, the mainly male Asians from the sub-continent living in the UK had been called Indians or Pakistanis. Most of the young British Asians

interviewed on the programme revealed that after 9/11, they preferred to be known by their own particular identity, and now therefore referred to themselves as British Hindu, British Muslim or Sikh, rather than British Asian. Despite the fact that this is evidence of an identity being forged from the inside, from the communities themselves rather than a term created by others as has always been the case in the past, Bhikhu Parekh sees it as a disturbing development. Interviewed on the same radio programme, he stated:

The tendency of a community to define itself entirely in religious terms, collapse its complete complex identity – political, cultural and others – into a single one-dimensional religious identity is a very worrying phenomenon... because if you define yourself in religious terms, then you're also bound to define others in religious terms, whether they like it or not. I think the other worrying part of it is that once you start defining yourself in religious terms then the question is: What is your mode of discourse? In terms of what do you argue? You inevitably turn to your scriptures, you inevitably turn to your religious principles and increasingly it becomes very difficult for you to operate in a relatively secular society.

Parekh, BBC Radio 4, 11.1.05 [transcribed from audio tape]

Ziauddin Sardar, an English-born Muslim writing in the *New Statesman* of his Hackney (east London) upbringing, commented on the number of white people that he met who found it difficult to grasp the fact that Hackney was his home.

They look at me and exclaim: 'Surely, you're Asian'. However, there is no such thing as an Asian. Asia is not a race or identity: it is a continent. Even in Asia, where more than half the world's population lives, no one calls him or herself 'Asian'. If you are not Chinese or Malaysian, then you are an Afghan or a Punjabi. Moreover the meaning of the term changes from place to place...In Britain, we do not use the term Asian to describe our substantial communities of Turks, Iranians or Indonesians, even though these countries are in Asia. At best, the label 'Asian' is meaningless. At worst, it is a denial of the fact that someone born and bred in Britain is actually British...

Sardar 2001:14

Sardar uses the same argument against using the term 'Asian' as the Hindu activists cited above. Sharma too notes that the ubiquitous title 'British Asian' is also problematic in that it 'essentializes both terms, as well as hierarchizing the former against the latter' (1996:219).

In the light of the government's white paper proposals in January 2002 that applications for citizenship for the UK would entail sitting an English test and taking an oath of allegiance, a teacher at an adult education college in Leicester was interviewed by *The*

Sunday Times. She noticed a change in the attitudes of students attending English classes that revealed a recoiling from a sense of being British. 'However long they've been in England, they're primarily Muslims or Jews or Hindus rather than British now', she remarked (Mackenzie 2002:5). She noted too that since 9/11, there is 'a terrific polarisation' and a 'growing tension' amongst those she teaches (ibid.).

An anthropological understanding of identity carries with it an ambiguity already noted in previous examples – the sense of both the uniqueness and individuality of each person's own identity, and the sense of sameness and belonging as part of a particular group. The latter creates a perception of difference with other, outside groups, which in turn creates highly complex and multidimensional boundary systems. Raj describes identity as 'negotiated and shifting, in a perpetual state of becoming' (2000:538). However for some, the situation is not so complex. Dancer Vena Ramphal [Gheerawo] speaks with confidence of identifying herself with both her own 'Britishness' and her Indian forebearers:

I am a dancer of Indian descent and British by birth and education. My upbringing has seen a combination of both 'Eastern' and 'Western' cultures; influences from both have moulded my being. I am very conscious of this, but the two have not remained separate as two different parts of my consciousness. They are intrinsically fused. I do not identify individually with two separate cultures. They are both part of my identity.

Gheerawo [Ramphal] 1997:51

Rather than creating an inner conflict, Ramphal's identity is enriched by the influences of both cultures; being British does not exclude her from being Asian, and conversely, being Asian does not preclude her from being British. As she states, they fuse in her being as one complete whole. It is possible too that this is symptomatic of her more privileged background (private school education followed by university, and access to training in music and dance, for example) that perhaps allows a greater ease in the relationship to the dominant host community, and that is indicated through changes in identity affiliation. Jeyasingh, giving the keynote address at Akademi's conference *South Asian Aesthetics Unwrapped* (March 24, 2002) spoke similarly of her ease with her multi-layered identity, stating, 'I was a Tamil in Sri Lanka, Christian in India, Hindu in East Malaysia and Indian in Britain. I don't feel fractured, I feel whole'.

2.8 Complexities of 'community'

An ethnographic study of the dance practices of two different Hindu communities necessitates defining and contextualising 'community' - a term whose meaning and usage has changed and radically developed within the social sciences during the last thirty years. The problematic nature of the expression has long been understood, as it appears to remain elusive to definition (see attempts by Warner 1941, Redfield 1960[1949] and Hillery 1955). In the past, concepts of togetherness in some form established the basis of the idea of a community – a commonality in terms of language, values, history, mores, or professions - and the distinctiveness that it engenders. Indeed the etymological definition of the word means, 'shared by all'. Anthropologist Robert Redfield, writing in 1949, defined this aspect as 'a homogeneity of activities and states of minds of members' (Rapport 1998:114) and added three other key qualitative features that mark a community: 'a smallness of social scale... a consciousness of distinctiveness; and a self-sufficiency across a broad range of needs and through time' (ibid). In traditional anthropological terms, a common interest, a common social system or structure creating social coherence and a common locality creates a community that is a functioning whole, and therefore able to be studied. Hence the anthropological interest in the 'community study' - studies which implied an analysis of the cultural expression and the social behaviour of that community in order to define, identify and rationalise the particularities and therefore to understand the whole. This approach is a functionalist one; it assumes that culture is essentially rational and can be examined systematically, and is based on the social cohesion of the studied community. Functionalism within anthropology therefore sees communities, through their homogeneity, demonstrating key structural units of social life.

In the late 1950s functionalism and the analysis of a coherent social order came under attack firstly by Max Gluckman and his colleagues (known as the 'Manchester School'). Their approach was a sociological reappraisal of conflict 'within social organization and ritual, resulting in a less static and more dialectical or processual, as well as transactional, model of society and religion' (Guenther 1997:162). Secondly, E.E.Evans-Pritchard argued that what had been excluded from the functionalist approach was a dimension of

meaning evident from social beings through their social action. Thirdly was the approach in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Victor Turner, who offered a synthesis of these two previous trajectories in his ideas of the importance of the processual and the symbolic, particularly related to the 'social drama' of a group or a community's actions, and in the analysis of ritual.¹⁸

By the late 1980s the functionalist view of community had been radically deconstructed, bringing a change in the prevailing ideas of the meaning of 'community'. Newer notions of examining a society through its world-views and myths, for example, revealed deeper structures at play in that society, and highlighted a more cultural and symbolic approach. This view was less concerned with a collective history of a community or group, as it examined the cultural expression now, in the present, as a continuous matter.

Anthropologist Anthony Cohen, espousing this notion, argued that community is a symbolic construct, created by the perception of boundaries by its members; it is where one 'continues to practice how to "be social" [and] where one acquires "culture" ' (Cohen 1985:15). This in fact means acquiring a common body of symbols and of sharing a discourse consisting of ideas or perceptions that brings meaning to all the participants. These symbols act as identity markers of that community, creating space for both individuality and a commonality. As Cohen defines it:

The symbols of community are mental constructs; they provide people with the means to make meaning. In so doing, they also provide them with the means to express the particular meanings which the community has for them.

Cohen 1985:19

Obvious evidence of this point in a Hindu community includes common participation in the same rituals, prayers to the same gods, and the wearing of similar clothes; and yet there is freedom for the individuals to express themselves as individuals as there is no 'tyranny of orthodoxy' (ibid:21). Meaning is created, recognised and expressed through these symbols and symbolic actions in which an outsider (a non-Hindu) would not participate unless invited.

Not only is there the recognition of the commonality of the community, but also that which distinguishes it from other groups, that is, its differences. Cohen describes this notion:

“Community” thus seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference. The word thus expresses a *relational* idea: the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities.

Cohen 1985:12

Cohen’s development of this theme of group or community boundaries in his examination of the symbolic construction of community focuses both on the marking out of difference and similarity. A boundary for example, may appear invisible to those outside it, but is highly significant to those within it; it ‘marks the beginning and end of a community’ (ibid). A sense of belonging and of identity is created and simultaneously, a perception of difference from others. This is evident in Hindu communities where religious worship is still the norm; those not participating in religious ritual are ‘outside’, and the practising of rituals and rites strengthens the community’s boundaries of those ‘within’. To an outsider the group or community may appear as a unified whole, as there is no partaking of the specific cultural knowledge that defines the group. Yet to those inside the community, the symbols and cultural forms communicate distinction and specificity within, unrecognisable by those on the outside. As a researcher, it is essential to become aware of the cultural distinctions within the group being researched, and to be wary of glossing over detail and making generalisations of facts.

Jean Cunningham’s study of a Bharatantayam dance school in Canada, set up in 1975 by East African Hindu emigrants reveals that the school ‘contributes to the generation and maintenance of community’ (1998:283-4) by articulating the boundary between the school’s students and mainstream Canadian life. In this way, the dance students affirm their own distinctiveness. Citing Cohen, Cunningham adds that the very nature of the dance form of Bharatanatyam – its classical status – carries in its symbols the heritage and shared ethnicity that are ‘particularly potent forms of boundary’ (ibid:284). This evidence confirms how ‘traditional’ dance forms may become markers for a community’s identity –culturally, ethnically and in some instances, of a religious identity. Cunningham speaks of how the young dance students of this school

lived with cultural duality on a daily basis. They accepted its ambivalences, though not uncritically. While professing a security in their own Indianness they nevertheless sought new insights into this identity. Dance was the medium of inner and outward exploration.

Cunningham 1998:289

The Leicester Gujarati community studied here, demonstrates a variety of backgrounds, has a history of different immigration patterns and worships different Hindu deities - in this sense it is not a homogenous group. Yet at another level it can be considered as one community – all members are Hindu, all live in Leicester, all are Gujarati by birth and by language and all value a shared cultural heritage. There are distinct boundaries perceived by them and other community groups in Leicester as their respective shared knowledges defines the limits of those thresholds. Within its common body of symbols that includes aspects of Hinduism, features of being ‘Indian’, and factors relating to its East African history, the Gujarati community may be viewed as a single entity, a community, despite, for example, its different *jatis* (caste groups) and its varied economic status. In this sense, I am viewing it and referring to it as a single ‘community’ for the purposes of this research. Karin Kapadia warns, however, in her studies on Indian religion, that

it is easy to succumb to a tendency to generalize one’s findings...such an approach tends to neglect the specificity of social context and so the significance of one’s findings may be misread. Indian society is hugely varied, so is religion in India.

Kapadia 2000:181

Kim Knott cautions against the ‘looseness of the word “community” with all its many applications to locality, faith, ethnicity, politics, education, sexuality and so on’ (2004:71) and writes of the way the term has been problematised more recently by academics who have debunked its reification and offered new terminologies in the light of a more globalised view of ‘community’. She notes how expressions such as ‘flows’, ‘scapes’ (Appadurai 1996:64), ‘spheres’, and ‘milieu’ (Durr Schmidt 1997) have been favoured in order to create the sense of extending the local boundaries often imposed by the word ‘community’ (Knott 2004:75).¹⁹

Baumann’s previously referred-to research amongst the Asian community in Southall, west London, revealed that:

The vast majority of all adult Southallians saw themselves as members of several *communities*, each with its own *culture*. The same person could speak and act as a member of the Muslim *community* in one context, in another takes sides against other Muslims as a member of the Pakistani *community*, and in a third count himself as part of the Punjabi *community* that excluded other Muslims but included Hindus, Sikhs and even Christians.

Baumann 1996:5

This point referring to the multiple identities that an individual may choose through his or her membership of different communities has been examined already in relation to changes in identity, but it does reveal how the notion of community, as with identity, can sustain a fluid and pragmatic meaning to individuals.

2.9 Whose identity?

Cultural identity forms an integral part of the sense of belonging – of being an insider in a community – and the specific cultural knowledge that is identified with defines the group and its members. This is particularly significant to those groups in a diaspora context where much emphasis is placed on the transmission of traditional practices such as music and dance. The concept of culture when interrogated reveals a complexity of notions that have metamorphosed over time from a word used synonymously with civilisation, and a singular and evaluative concept, to a sense of pluralistic *cultures*. Today's public use of the concept is often highly political, and frequently implies a sharp distinction between high and popular culture.

Both ethnic and religious identity are powerful forces that contribute to a sense of cultural identity, but evidence is now revealing that religious identity is taking precedence.

Jacobson's research work (1997), for example, found young British Asians choosing their Muslim or Hindu allegiances for their main identity, rather than their Indian, British or Pakistani heritage. Other studies (Back 1996, Lyon 1997) have found that use of multiple identities is common, where young Asians' self-ascription is made in relation to the particular situation in which they find themselves. They literally ascribe their own ethnicity as it suits them in any given situation. Some too, find themselves content to recognise their mixed heritage as a rich cultural identity and declare that this is what makes them essentially who they are.

In Chapter Four, using an ethnographic methodology, I examine the cultural expression of the Gujarati community in Leicester, asking whether and how their dance practices may form markers of cultural, ethnic and religious identity. Before proceeding to that fieldwork, Part 1 of this thesis concludes by presenting in the next chapter the methodologies utilised in the research.

Notes:

¹ The term 'ethnic cleansing' (a literal translation of the Serbo-Croat *etničko ciscenje* -Bolaffi et al 2003:90) came into use during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1980s and 1990s. 'The term was initially used by journalists and politicians who later applied it to other crisis situations, but it has also been adopted as part of the official vocabulary of UN Security Council documents and by other UN institutions and governmental and non-governmental international organizations' (Petrovic 1994:1). The later genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the crisis in Sudan (2004) have too been described as 'ethnic cleansing', and of course, the concept was not unknown in World War II.

² Taken from programme notes for the production of Verma's *Journey to the West* (2002a).

³ The term 'double consciousness' is taken from Paul Gilroy's writings on the black American diaspora, *The Black Atlantic* (1993). It was developed originally with regard to race relations by the intellectual black activist William E.B.Du Bois.

⁴ Jeyasingh sees her work as a product of global culture. Her work, *Making of Maps* (1992), re-drew world boundaries, charting an artistic territory where east and west were no longer separate cultures.

⁵ See also Homi Bhabha where he speaks of the space between the boundaries of languages and communities and of creatively 'crossing over' that space. He describes it as 'moving in-between cultural traditions' (2000: 140-141).

⁶ This was renamed and re-formed from the old Department of National Heritage. Its overall aim is 'to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, and to strengthen the creative industries' (Mission statement www.culture.gov.uk).

⁷ Cited in the *Daily Express* 21.4.90. Tebbit suggested that a 'cricket test' be used as a benchmark to measure immigrants' loyalty to Britain. The immigrants were accused by him of being disloyal if they failed to support the English cricket team when playing in matches against teams from countries of their own origins. Despite receiving much criticism for these remarks, Tebbit continued to defend his racist views. Tebbit had remarked already in 1989 that 'most people in Britain did not want to live in a multicultural, multiracial society, but it has been foisted upon them' (Solomos 1989:218), and he continued to reiterate Margaret Thatcher's famous 1978 statements that the British people were fearful of being swamped by immigrants.

A further example is from John Pattern, Conservative home minister for race relations, who wrote a paper 'On being British' (18.7.89), in which he stressed the need to maintain the core of British culture and the need for immigrants to learn about the British ways of life. See Asad (1998) for a polemical attack on this paper and an examination of the nationalist language used by the then Conservative government.

⁸ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/world_at_one/.

⁹ Keith Vaz, Labour MP for Leicester East, Iqbal Sacranie, secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain and Ahmed Versi, editor of the Muslim News were amongst many representing the UK's leading ethnic minority groups who spoke out in protest at Blunkett's remarks (Casciani 2002).

¹⁰ Information from www.HinduismToday.com January 10 2005, and BBC Radio 4 'Sunday' programme, January 16 2005.

¹¹ Evidence of the use of cultural activities as a political tool by South Asian UK groups was noted by Dudrah in an article on British Bhangra music (2002). He writes of how in 'a direct attack on the ruling Conservative Party at the time and its then leader and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher for introducing the infamous Community Charge' (ibid:186) in 1990, a Birmingham based bhangra band released a track entitled 'Dhol Tax'. The opposition to this new tax had named it the poll tax and the song's title is a play on this term. Dudrah continues by stating that the song, 'through its combination of humorous and satirical lyrics with energetic *dhol* [Punjabi drum] playing and urgent synthesizers, articulated the message to South Asian communities that they were one of the hardest hit groups by this new tax and that they should refuse to pay' (ibid: 186-187).

¹² Interviewed by Sue Lawley on *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4, May 2003.

¹³ See Owe Ronström's dance and music ethnographic work carried out on the Yugoslav community in Stockholm (Ronström 1999) and MA ethnographic research carried out by this author on *Tatry*, a Polish dance group based in west London, March 1999 (David 1999).

¹⁴ See Barot (1991:193).

¹⁵ *Hindutva* 'has come to mean Hindu-ness, a doctrine that promotes Hindu culture and social formation as the root of national structure' (Raj 2000:554).

¹⁶ Tara Arts' play *Journey to the West* included these facts about Sunrise Radio on display boards in the foyer of the theatre as well as a migratory history of the East African Asians.

¹⁷ *Don't Call Me Asian* broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 11.1.05. The reporter was Sarfraz Manzoor and the producer Mohit Bakaya.

¹⁸ Turner's more evolutionary approach has been criticised by Bloch (1974), who claimed that Turner's view of ritual was restrictive and produced conformity, and by Sallnow (1987), who proposed too that Turner's three-fold model of ritual is a somewhat inflexible analytical tool.

¹⁹ The misleading connotations of words such as 'group', 'community', 'worlds', 'association' to describe the various localities of music-making in Milton Keynes, UK provoked Ruth Finnegan into the use of a new term - 'pathways' (Finnegan 1989:305). Used as a metaphor to illuminate 'certain features of local music and its implications for urban life' (ibid), the term seeks to capture the qualities of 'the over-lapping and intersecting nature of different musical traditions' (ibid:306) and the various music practices which people attended, as also the symbolic depth of these routines.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

Generally speaking, anthropologists aim to attain insights into a sociocultural group by studying its movement systems...Folklorists are often already familiar with the societies they study and they have a different agenda which is community-based and for a long time focused on authenticity...Dance ethnologists also focus on the content of dances and, if they study the context, it is usually the event context in which the dances take place.

Kaeppler 1999:15

In this chapter, I examine methodological approaches to the study of dance and consider the three prominent disciplines contributing to this area – anthropology, folklore studies and sociology. I discuss the role of ethnography within this framework and show how this research examining Hindu dance practices draws from the three main disciplines cited above, utilising ethnography as the central research tool in this process.

3.1 An ethnographic approach

the way people move provides a key to the way they think
and feel and to what they know.

Sklar 1991:6

As a practice, ethnography has a wide range of methods and far-reaching applications that have formed the backbone of classical anthropology and social and cultural anthropology from the early twentieth century to the present day. Indeed, ethnography's 'centrality to social or cultural anthropology is unquestionable' (Atkinson et al 2001:2). Ethnography involves research that is based on direct observation of and participation in a community's way of life. As Sklar states, 'an ethnographer seeks not only to describe but to understand what constitutes a people's cultural knowledge' (1991:6), and therefore the ethnographer will question how a group of people make or find meaning.¹ The term 'ethnography' indicates firstly the process of work in the field (fieldwork) where participant observation is the pivotal tool, supported by other approaches including interviews, quantitative surveys, and aural and film recording. Secondly, it refers to the product, the writing up, of the results of that research. This product is of course,

dependent on the process. Ethnography is not, however, a methodology that is easily defined, as Atkinson states:

Although it has been a feature of social science research through most of the twentieth century, and has become pervasive across a wide range of disciplinary applications, ethnography escapes ready summary definitions.
Atkinson et al 2001:1

The coined phrase 'dance ethnography' is Anglo-American in provenance and has been used frequently by Sklar (1991, 2000, 2001a, 2001b) to describe the investigation of dance as a form of cultural knowledge using ethnographic techniques. This approach questions why people move in the way they do and how this relates to what they believe and value. Dance ethnography takes as its premise the fact that cultural knowledge is embodied in peoples' movement vocabulary, and that it can be discovered through an analysis of those forms and their context. Dance ethnographers concentrate therefore, on the people and their movement systems as expressions of cultural knowledge, rather than their society as a whole. This can be primarily achieved through the researcher's commitment to participate in the dance and movement practices and to observe the kinetic forms and the entirety of the dance event, that is, through the method of participant observation. Not only the obvious forms of dance and movement systems, but all actions, rhythms, postures, ways of doing can express what is hidden behind the obvious physical manifestation. Hence an exploration of such practices reveals the hidden cultural codes, and displays the conceptual thought and words that bind a community and in which their history, traditions, beliefs, knowledges, and communications are held. In this way the invisible culture of a society is made visible through its representations such as its dance and movement systems. Sklar notes that:

Dance writing that is ethnographic calls upon local contextual information about social values, religious beliefs, symbolic codes, and historical constructions to illuminate the significance of a dance event.

Sklar 1991:6

Sklar's emphasis here is exemplified in Jane Cowan's anthropological account of the dancing and the dance-events of a small, northern Greek town (1990). In her analysis of those events, Cowan focuses on aspects of gender and sexuality that dominate the community, and that are revealed through their dance practices. Cowan argues that she is

less concerned with defining the dance as a subject in itself, but rather as ‘a medium and as a context of social action’ (ibid:18).

Recent developments in the literature dealing with ethnographic methodology have impacted on the practice of dance ethnography and resulted in a move away from a positivist stance whose main ideas relate to the world being essentially ‘knowable’, logical and governed by universal laws, to a more post-modern, reflexive position. These developments are characterised by ‘reflexivity, self-criticism, and increasing eclecticism’ (Brettell 1993:1), in which ethnographic techniques have come under a new spotlight, and increasing attention and interest has been given to both the fieldwork experience and the written product. Charlotte Aull-Davies points out the importance of issues of reflexivity in ethnographic research ‘in which the involvement of the researcher in the society and culture being studied is particularly close’ (1999:4). The participation of the ethnographer in the field and the subsequent construction of data and the written text, necessitates a position of self-examination, or ‘a process of self-reference’ (ibid:4).

The need for reflexivity on the part of the ethnographer is shown distinctly in the work of dance anthropologists Grau (1999), Drid Williams (1994, 1999) and Brenda Farnell (discussed later in the chapter), and is emphasised also in the writings of James Clifford and George Marcus. Clifford and Marcus’s influential edited volume of essays (1986) analysed the writings of the ethnographers and called for more experimentally reflexive ethnographic writing. Their focus on the texts examined the construction of the writing and questioned how issues of power, resistance, gender and innovation can be expressed in the light of the post-modern concern with the problematic topic of representation. How may the informants speak for themselves in a text? How is the ‘truth’ of a situation represented? Is the ethnographer in fact a ‘keeper of the truth’? (Buckland 1999):

In a post-positivist climate, the researcher recognizes that there is no one stable and overriding interpretation. Voices from the field do indeed compete; there is almost inevitably no consensus of interpretation that the ethnographer can publish nor one truth to be established.

Buckland 1999:197

The practice of reflexivity remains a particularly significant factor for the fieldworker as an awareness of the power of one’s own preconceptions, ethical background, gender,

education and beliefs is essential in approaching work in the field. Any sense of 'other' in approaching a new and unknown community has to be identified and set aside if real understanding is to take place. Grau points out that there is a 'danger inherent in any research dealing with identity in that it can be seen to "ethnicise" its subjects' (2001:24) and therefore scrutiny is needed to avoid any sense of 'othering'. Learning the particular language spoken can be an important tool in this regard, not only for obvious communication, but also to enable a fuller entry into the life of the community. Already notions that I had held about the different dance forms and Hindu religious life have had to be abandoned as more is learnt in the field, and this is a continual process as understanding deepens. I had not envisaged how important a part 'Bollywood' or 'filmi' dance now plays in the community and therefore religious life, and of course, particularly for the young people. At the *Mela* Indian festival in Leicester in 2002, an Asian teenager was performing her own choreographed 'Bollywood' dance, which to my western, middle-class, classically danced-trained view, appeared sensuous, provocative and somewhat superficial. Yet in speaking to the eighteen-year old after her performance, she described how she believed her dance was a gift from God and how she always performed her *namaskar* (prayer to the deity) before performing, retaining, it seemed, both a ritual and religious component in her dance. This has revealed the need for further questioning and investigation in this area, both of informants and of my own views on religion and its expression, and of the notion that the sacred and the secular form a dichotomy. A later chapter addresses the issue of the influence of Bollywood or 'filmi' dance forms on traditional dance practices.

Williams discusses too the need for genuine reflexivity on the part of an anthropologist/ethnographer so that an accurate assessment of facts not distorted by the inherent and unseen 'knowing' that we bring to any situation. To practise reflexivity is to question those aspects of 'knowing' – the assumptions, cultural preferences, binaries of right and wrong, attitudes, and importance ascribed to various actions that we hold - and to discover how the society being investigated classifies, categorises and terms its culture and movement practices.

Without such understanding, we cannot begin to enter into a dialogue with others about what *they* think it means to be an embodied person,

and so what it means to do dance, or sign, or engage in ritual and ceremonial practices.

Farnell 1999a:156

Here, Farnell, trained in structural anthropology by Williams, underlines the need for critical, reflexive understanding of our assumptions, adding that it is 'a necessary prerequisite to ethnographic field research' (ibid).

Many writers discussing the field of ethnographic work stress the necessity for a reflexive approach where the researcher acknowledges that he or she is in fact part of the world that is being studied, and therefore will affect the situation or community (see Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Michael Agar makes the point that 'Ethnography is neither subjective nor objective. It is interpretive, mediating two worlds through a third.' (1986:19). The interpretation that the ethnographer makes of the field under investigation governs not only how the fieldwork is practised, but also influences the analysis of the data gathered and the writing up of that analysis.

Accounts from the field by single women ethnographers indicate how their unmarried status can be either a hindrance or a facilitating factor in their work, depending on the society being studied. Otome Hutheesing (1993), embarking on fieldwork in a small village in the Lisu mountains of northern Thailand, found her single status worked both ways. As a solitary woman she was an anomaly to the tribe who tried to rectify this by marrying her to various Lisu men. But, as an older woman (aged 52), she also gained access to areas forbidden to the other women, for example, the village shrine of the most senior ancestral spirit. She had a non-polluting, non-threatening sexual status, and so was treated as an honorary man/woman. Cowan was married but unaccompanied by her husband when she started her studies in a northern Greek town (1990). Constantly asked about her marital status, Cowan realised after some time that her informants' confusion about her status was not one of language. She was married, but lived alone with no children and she was a student. So their perception of her was of a girl (*koritsi*). This enabled her to live a double life in the village – that of girl and of woman – by providing entry to both the worlds. My role in my research was confined as a non-Indian, non-Hindu female, although competence in dance movements and previous study of Indian

classical dance forms assisted my acceptance into the dance events and the communities. Being female allowed very easy access into women's groups, girls-only dance classes and conducting interviews with women, and neither did it prevent interviews with male priests, temple presidents and other older male respondents.² There is no doubt too, that being married is more acceptable in the Hindu community as Hindu women are expected to be married by a certain age, and I have been received into families and social situations more easily in this role. Indeed, in certain Hindu communities where stricter religious customs are observed, an unmarried woman is considered inauspicious.

Clifford and Marcus's book has been critiqued for its lack of portrayal of the feminine standpoint, for which an apology is made by the editors in their introduction as well as for their omissions of perspectives from 'photography, film, performance theory, documentary art, the nonfiction novel, "the new journalism", oral history and various forms of sociology' (1986:19). Although these were significant gaps in this influential text, subsequent writers address issues of feminist and gender considerations in the context of ethnography. Diane Bell's edited book (1993) presents a variety of writers' accounts of their fieldwork experiences in relation to questions of gender, interrogating what affect the anthropologist's gender may have on the process of fieldwork.

Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod raises the question, *Can There be a Feminist Ethnography?* in her published lecture of the same title. She argues:

that we are at a critical juncture in the trajectories of both feminism and anthropology that makes the development of a feminist ethnography both more possible and more desirable.

Abu-Lughod 1990:8

The recent interrogation of the need for objectivity within anthropology, the questions of reflexivity and the 'literary attention to the production of written representations' (ibid :9) are discussed also by Abu-Lughod in the light of feminist practice and the innovative texts being produced by certain women ethnographers and anthropologists.

The issue of the written representation of fieldwork has received substantial attention and has been the subject, as indicated above, of considerable debate. John Van Maanen's two books (1988, 1995) on ethnography address factors of representation and the writing of

the ethnography, as does Clifford Geertz's renowned text *Works and Lives - The Anthropologist as Author* (1988). Geertz explores the dilemmas facing the anthropologist/ethnographer in the writing up of data, that is, of producing scientific texts from biological experiences, and implies that being there in writing is as difficult as being there in the field (ibid:24). He presents six different models of writing up, each one exemplified by examining the writing of well-known anthropologists. Geertz acknowledged the then-current debate, saying:

Whether the period immediately ahead leads to a renewal of the discursive energies of anthropology or to their dissipation, a recovery of authorial nerve or its loss, depends on whether the field (or, more exactly, its would-be practitioners) can adjust itself to a situation in which its goals, its relevance, its motives, and its procedures are all questioned.

Geertz 1988:138-139

Debate and discussion will no doubt continue in the ethnographic arena regarding reflexivity, theoretical candour, representation and power, and the creation of the final textural product. But, 'the fluidity of the ethnographic enterprise' (Buckland 1999:8) remains the most compelling element of the whole process, allowing for a comprehensive engagement with the people studied, and it is this adaptable aspect which is particularly relevant for research into dance practices.

3.2 Anthropological perspectives

Although both dance ethnographers and anthropologists show a consensus of essential understanding in admitting that human movement systems without doubt are an expression of social and cultural knowledge, their systems are fundamentally different. Remarks made by Sklar (1991:6), and Farnell that 'human beings everywhere engage in complex structured systems of bodily action that are laden with social and cultural significance' (1999b: 343) support their belief in human movement systems. But as Farnell makes clear (1991, 1992, 1999a), anthropologists seek to understand the totality of a society through a consideration of all aspects of culture; human movement systems constitute just one of those dimensions which can assist in the understanding of the whole. A focus on systems of dance and human movement enables the anthropologist to gain greater insight into the society through an analysis of those movement systems.

Added to this is the study of ‘intention, meaning, and cultural evaluation’ (Kaeppler 1992:151) in order that the total socio-cultural system of a people may be better comprehended. In contrast, dance ethnology concentrates on the people and their movement practices, rather than on their society as a whole, and examine dances and the whole dance event as expressions of cultural knowledge, in a cultural context.

An anthropological training (particularly in the USA) includes four fields of anthropology – that of physical anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and socio-cultural anthropology (Kaeppler 1991). Ethnography forms part of the methodology of the socio-cultural area of anthropology, with its essential long-term work in the field, most usually a minimum period of a year. This was traditionally a stay in a culture distinct and distant from the anthropologist’s own, but recent trends have shown an increase in the practice of ‘fieldwork at home’, more often in the past the realm of ethnographers and sociologists. This type of fieldwork is often characterised by short, but intensive stays in the field, indeed, some ethnochoreological fieldwork in Romania (to be discussed later), lasted for just two or three days in one village (Giurchescu 1999:46). As Giurchescu points out:

Decisions on fieldwork duration relate not only to practical circumstances, but, more fundamentally, to theoretical perspectives; the length of time spent in the field is a major distinction between anthropological and ethnochoreological approaches.

Giurchescu 1999:46

Anthropologists need to remain longer in their host community because of the nature of their enquiry. Their fieldwork is the means to gaining knowledge of all aspects of the everyday lives of their informants, hence the need to live in and participate with the community for an extended period. Competence with the host language is also a necessary factor not just for the purpose of essential communication, but because ‘linguistic emphases also furnish keys to cultural or social emphases, and language structure may be the key to movement and other structures’ (Kaeppler 1999:20).

A methodology selected by a researcher follows directly from the research questions proposed, so the type of fieldwork undertaken will be specific for the purpose of that

research. Similarly with the theoretical approaches supporting the work.

Anthropologists Kaeppler and Williams, for example, in their search to find systematic patterns in human movement forms, chose to investigate the structures inherent in kinetic forms through the use of linguistic analogies. Kaeppler used a 'kinemic and morphokinemic analysis' (1992:153) to break down the structure of body movements into basic components during her research into Tongan aesthetics. In her attempt to discover 'indigenous theories about indigenous movement systems' (1999:19) in Tonga, she examined and analysed the movements she saw performed using etic/emic distinctions of semantic theory.³ Williams devised a theory of semasiology for her dance anthropological work, drawing from Noam Chomsky, Ferdinand de Saussure and semiotics to evolve an analytical framework based on action signs that deal with the semantic content of human body languages (1976, 1999). Her premise is a logical one: that 'all human "culture" is a kind of language – or "linguaging" process' (1976:28), and that in analysing 'the language of movement' as a human semiotic system, one finds a structured grammatical foundation just as in a verbal language. She and Kaeppler were adamant however, that dance is not a language. Williams points out how:

Different ethnicities have generated different values for the dimensions of right/left, up/down, front/back, inside/outside...These contrary oppositions do not *mean* the same things cross-culturally.

Williams 1976:28

Like Kaeppler, Williams challenges the terminology and conceptual thinking of the western dance writer/academic who will write of a people's dance form using vocabulary that is only meaningful to his or her western peers. 'How would they [the terms] translate, if indeed, they would at all, into the spoken language of the people concerned?' she asks (ibid:25).

3.3 Folklore studies and ethnography

A significant strand of academic and practical work that historically has fed into dance ethnography is that of the European dance scholars. This particular research field developed from the discipline of folklore studies that had its roots in the cultural politics and nationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. 'Authentic' regional dances are studied, collated, classified and even reconstructed with a view to retrieving

traditional folk dances that appear to have been lost, and to enhance the sense of a national identity. Fieldwork was, and continues to be the dominant method of research, practised by teams of ethnographers trained in filming, photography, aural recording techniques and interviewing expertise and who are funded by their respective governments (Giurchescu 1999). These methods of recording are then followed by structural analysis of the dance forms and the whole process viewed as scientific work. In many of the countries of the eastern bloc, for example Hungary, Romania and Poland, the research was influenced strongly by Soviet (Marxist) ideology which stressed the unimportance of the individual and the controlling of traditional symbols to legitimate political power. The only dances studied were those of the native country, despite many other multi-ethnic influences; for example in Romania, only Romanian dances were researched, not those of the gypsies or other groups. These political controls created many difficulties for the researchers, as Giurchescu, one of Romania's leading ethnochoreologists describes:

Communist officials have, for over 40 years, tried to direct and control the institutionalized research process and use of folklore in mass culture. This situation resulted in a constant tension between researchers of folklore and 'specialists' in culture management...Under the Communist regime (1945-89), folklore researchers were compelled to harmonize their research goals with dominant political values in accordance with two distinct but sequential ideological and political values.

Giurchescu 1999:43

The strength of the European approach in dance ethnography is its attention to the analysis of the structure of the dance movements and the creation of a new form of analysis. The motifs, the syntax, and the dynamics of the dance are recorded on check-lists and then examined on computer for repetition, design and overall structure, and this data is classified. Through this process much of the rich traditional dance culture has been documented and the processes of diffusion, change and stability noted. The Hungarian emphasis is noted here by dance ethnographer Laszlo Felföldi:

Hungarian researchers focus on certain basic ethnographic and aesthetic aspects to achieve this aim. We emphasize the social, historical and geographical, which indicates our commitment to the methods of the historical-geographical and comparative-historical schools of research. With regard to the dances themselves, we lay stress on the formal-morphological-structural, the functional-semantic and the musical aspects, which demonstrates our adherence to the morphological schools of European folklore research.

Felföldi 1999:58

There are both similarities and differences in the European choreological and the American anthropological approach. The historical background and therefore development of each discipline is varied, yet in the last twenty years,

the contacts between “American” dance anthropology and “European” analytical-descriptive, choreology, far from generating conflictive opposition, has resulted in a more comprehensive perspective which integrates theoretical and historical approaches with socio-cultural contexts.

Giurchescu and Torp 1991:5

The work of the structuralists within dance anthropology such as Farnell, Kaeppler, and Williams with their systematic analysis of human movement based on grammatical analogies, (discussed above), bears many similarities to the formal, morphological and structural approaches of the eastern European dance researchers, despite the differences in approach and aims. Felföldi, head of the Dance Department of the Institute of Musicology in Budapest, describes how Hungarian folk dance analysis derives from ‘extensive field experiences, from the different morphological schools of folklorists...and linguistic theory’ (1999:60). In the same way as the American anthropologists, the method seeks to identify the various structural units of the dance and to ‘uncover the rules of their composition into higher structural units’ (ibid). This search for an implicit grammar within the dance idiom integrates both the work of the structural anthropologists and the ethno-choreologists and uses ethnography as its prime methodology.

3.4 Sociology and the dance

Ethnographic methodology has a long tradition within social and cultural anthropology, and has featured prominently within social science research throughout most of the twentieth century, particularly in urban sociology and studies of small communities.⁴ Yet, as Atkinson argues: ‘Ethnography, in our view, has never been the sole preserve of anthropology, nor of Chicago sociology, nor of symbolic interactionism, nor of any other interest group’ (Atkinson et al 2001:2). It is only recently, however, that ethnography has been integrated into sociological studies of dance (Thomas 1997b:91). There are several reasons for this gap in scholarly writing which have been set out clearly by sociologist Helen Thomas (1993a, 1995, 2002), and Peter Brinson (1983), but is primarily due to the neglect of the moving, non-verbal body within sociology. Thomas argues that although ‘dancing is a social activity which has a tradition of popular appeal’ (1995:3) and is an

integral part of society's cultural expression both in its mainstream and sub-cultures, historically dance studies have not been included in work of a sociological discipline.

There has also been a considerable amount of research interest in the body within anthropology, while classical sociology did not generate a thoroughgoing analysis of the body in society. The dualisms which enabled anthropology to direct its attention towards the body and dancing in traditional cultures, were contributory factors in sociology's neglect of the body and dance.

Thomas 1995:9

This has created a lack of a sustained and systematic framework only now being addressed by such writers as Thomas who have made full use of ethnographic practices in their sociological studies of dance.

Thomas, writing on the emergence and development of American modern dance, views dance as 'a reflexive bodily practice which inheres sets of emergent meanings' (ibid:21) and her aim is, through a systematic approach, to elucidate those meanings. Her approach to dance ethnography is based on Geertz's 'thick description'; that is, to view ethnography as an interpretative act that deals with complex conceptual structures, and as she describes it, an act that 'should bring us into touch with the lives of "strangers"' (1997b:143). She seeks to celebrate ethnography within sociology 'as an intellectual pursuit for the analysis of cultural forms and practices' (ibid:142), and sees sociology's neglect and marginalisation of dance being due to several factors; partly that the non-verbal expression of dance creates difficulties in its analysis from a sociological point of view, and, also, more importantly, the western historical attitudes and perceptions of the body and of dance practices, which view the mind and the body in binary opposition. This Cartesian dualism privileges mind over body, rational thought over emotion, verbal over non-verbal, culture over nature, and impartial over personal, and in this scheme, mind represents culture and the body nature. Hence 'the perceived nearness of the body to nature rather than culture has consequences for dance' (Thomas 1995:8) and has much to account for sociology's past lack of attention to dance and movement expressions.

Thomas's work has explored new and original sociological domains of particular dance practices in London and its vicinities. Her interest in examining the significance of dance in young people's lives led to a research project with a local community dance

project in Lewisham, south-east London. Using ethnographic methods of participant observation of classes and rehearsals, interviews and group discussions, Thomas explored the young women's views about their bodies, their dancing and their sense of gender within dance practices. Subsequent filming of the group (which also included young men) revealed issues of gender relations and common notions of femininity and masculinity in their dance praxis, as well as the representation of black/white dancers and of Afro-Caribbean/European dance (1993b).

Further sociological ethnographic research carried out by Thomas has investigated contemporary ballroom dance practices amongst the older generations. This research has addressed such issues of ageing and bodily memory, the importance and effect of dress codes, the cultural expectations and prejudices held about ballroom dance and the dancers' own perceptions of their bodies and dance abilities. Two of Thomas's projects, *Ballroom Blitz* and *Dancing into the Third Age* expose an extensive existent area of social dance practices that are mostly invisible to all but the participants. These are dance forms 'on the margin, practised more or less quietly by less visible strata and subcultures of society' (Meglin 2000:139). *Dancing into the Third Age* aimed to assess the meanings of social dance as a cultural practice for people aged over-sixty by selecting dance events in south-east London and in Essex (Thomas 2001). It used an ethnographic approach with participant observation and interviewing techniques, and examined the dance 'in order to be able to say something about the cultural practices and processes that inform it' (Thomas and Cooper, 2002:59). In this sense, it follows the work of some dance anthropologists who investigate the movement systems of a community to enable a greater understanding of the whole social context.

The ethnographic approach used and the issues emerging from Thomas's research carry significance for this study examining dance practices of the Hindu community. Factors relating to dress codes, to gender, to older bodies dancing, to the historical memories carried in the bodies and the attraction of a type of 'communitas' (i.e. the sense of dancing as 'one'), all feature in Thomas's research, as they do in my research. An additional important aspect of both research projects cited is the city location, which

Thomas's edited collection, *Dance in the City* (1997a) has as its focus. The book locates dance within the spectrum of urban life and investigates a wide range of dance forms 'for which the contemporary fragmented city is a centrifugal force for the mapping of bodies in space and time' (Thomas 1997a:x). Five of the thirteen especially commissioned papers for the book draw on ethnographic methods for their exploration of dance practices and of the people who dance; these include the already-cited ballroom studies, rave dance culture, Irish set dancing, the ballet class and erotic strip-tease dance. As stated by one reviewer:

In this volume, dance ethnography comes into its own, emerging as a powerful mode of inquiry. What better way to fathom the city than to consult many voices, explore multiple perspectives, relish the dissonance, and imagine the lives behind the sea of individual faces?

Meglin 2000:138

3.5 Fieldwork issues

A major stage in the research process of dance ethnography is work in the field. The fieldwork is not just an end in itself, but is directly related to the writing up of the evidence found, and yet tends to dominate the approach of an ethnography (Van Maanen 1995). Questions have to be asked relating to who is dancing? (and, just as significant, who does not dance?). Where do they dance and why? When does the dance take place? Fieldwork not only explores all these aspects of the dance meticulously but also can embrace the entirety of the dance event with all its component parts – socialising, eating, talking, singing and in the case of the Hindu community, prayers and other devotional activities. It includes the organisers of the occasion and their influence on the dance; the identity of the audience and the role that it plays; the perceptions of the dance held by the onlookers and the performers; the transmitters of the dance steps and their styles of transmission: all these influencing factors can be observed and interrogated. Work in the field is directed by such enquiry, and employs familiar anthropological methods of participant- observation, interviews, questionnaires, and recording techniques with video and audio tapes.

An ethnographic approach to the study of a community's dance practices enables different voices to be heard through interviews, questionnaires and filming. However, the ethnographer has to be wary of exploitation or manipulation of these 'other' voices. It is a collaborative project, yet in the final analysis, the researcher has control and authors the narrative, so sensitivity and a reflexive stance are an essential means of validation. A question that I have continually asked throughout this research and the written ethnography is: 'How is the world of the 'other' being represented in my work?'

In this research project I interrogate the conception and values placed upon dance within Hindu religious worship, and seek to understand the relationship between dance and spirituality in present praxis. The fieldwork has been undertaken over a period of three years and has included annual attendance and participation in major Hindu festivals (e.g. *Navratri*, *Diwali*, *Sivaratri*); regular visits to Hindu temples for particular cultural events and for dance classes; attendance at other Asian events i.e. conferences, plays, dance performances, and interviews with Asian dance practitioners, dance teachers, dance students, their families and other members of the Hindu communities.

An ethnographic methodology has been found to be most suitable to meet these aims and objectives and has included qualitative aspects of participant observation, (which at times can be also wholly participational or wholly observational), formal and semi-formal interviews, questionnaires, and video and aural recording to pursue these research questions and for collection of data within a cultural context. Additionally to this process, I have examined archival documents, census data, artefacts and media materials which have enabled me to 'explore processes not immediately or appropriately accessible through participant observation' (Amit 2000:12). Analysis of this type of secondary source material must be undertaken with a critical eye in order to question authenticity, credibility and representativeness of the data studied.

The current literature relating to ethnographic research reveals a particularly pertinent and extensive range of texts that address the practical details of ethnographic practice such as accomplishing fieldwork, the writing up of field-notes, negotiating access, the

planning of questionnaires, tape-recording of interviews and so on. Robert Emerson et al's book (1995) deals primarily with the many problems and differences of opinion in writing up field-notes; Robert Burgess's two books (1984, 1991) give advice for fieldwork in terms of a manual for practice. Others focus, again in manual form on the specifics of tape-recorded interviews, for example Edward Ives (1995) and Valerie Yow (1994). Martyn Hammersley's books (1992, 1995, 1998,) not only thoroughly survey the wide-ranging history and approach to ethnographic techniques and principles, but also give practical guidance in all aspects of the methodology. The tensions and paradoxes of the tradition of fieldwork as it is practised in the contemporary world are examined in detail in Vered Amit's publication (2000), and thus it has been relevant to this particular study in which tensions of this kind have been met.

3.5:1 Techniques of fieldwork – film and interviews

Working in the field as an ethnographer necessitates not only questioning the methods of recording information, but also the construction of knowledge effected by such recordings. Both visual and textural accounts remain highly limited techniques of conveying the rich, thick level of information and experience present in the fieldwork events, and of necessity, are subject to the ethnographer's selective processes. Due to the ephemeral nature of performances of dance and music, film and audio recording are especially important as tools for instant recording, but need to be utilised by the ethnographer with an awareness of these facts. In particular, film and photography capture forms but are unable to convey implicit meanings, so only a partial reality is communicated. Hastrup suggests that textural and film accounts have a hierarchical relationship where the text can bring a 'thick' description, whilst film techniques offer only a 'thin' one. She states, 'They are not in conflict, nor are they just complementary modes of expression, because they do not operate on the same logical level' (1992:21).

Other drawbacks of these techniques are noted: Hastrup speaks of the effect of film on the onlooker which she describes as 'an immense power of seduction' (ibid:14), persuading the viewer that what they are watching exists and is accurate, and forgetting that it is simply a selected representation. Similarly, for Charlotte Aull Davies, one of the

major weaknesses of using photography or video footage in ethnographic work is 'the tendency to treat visual evidence as comparatively unproblematic' (1999:120). Farnell (1994: 963) reminds the anthropologist that film only records from one selective position at any one time, creating a 'front' to the action as in a staged performance. Yet many dance and ritual situations are not enacted in this way, so that when the action turns away from the camera, it cannot be seen, thus creating a partial recording. Despite the limitations of the medium of film, the strengths of film recording lie in the fact that film footage allows for repeated viewing of particular sequences of dance, and this in turn offers the possibility of movement analysis. Film and still images are also able to convey information that may have been missed at an event, or reveal data which were not obvious at the time.

One famous recording of Indian Vedic ritual was made in 1975 in a village in Kerala, south-west India by Frits Staal. Staal filmed the complete 12-day cycle of a Nambudiri fire ritual that had not been performed for twenty years and that Staal thought would probably never be performed again (Staal 1979:2). This event revealed some of the problematic issues regarding the use of ethnographic filming. On one level, his film was an extraordinary achievement and a significant one in terms of the overwhelming research detail now available to historians, Sanskrit scholars and researchers of all kinds through the film. But the filming itself caused substantial problems, as Catherine Bell states in her description of the event. She noted that the filming gave the appearance of:

a stable, unchanging tradition captured in pure form on film. In truth, the documentary cannot be a neutral and passive recording of the tradition. It is a constructed view of a new ritual hybrid, a conjunction of foreign interests and funding with Indian tradition and resources.

Bell 1997:248

Schechner (1989:360) points out too that the money for the filming and the undertaking of the sacrificial ritual was provided by European, Japanese and American academics; it was not donated from a local patron as would traditionally happen. Staal, as a non-Hindu, was prevented from entering the sacrificial space, so much of the filming had to take place from above. Additionally, the central feature of the ritual involved the sacrifice of fourteen goats and the prospect of this custom taking place caused a local and political furore which threatened to prevent filming. Eventually a compromise was

reached that was acceptable to the Brahmin priests officiating during the ritual – rice cakes wrapped in banana leaves were substituted for the goats – and the recording got under way. Bell's final comment on this idiosyncratic event is a caution to ethnographers using film in their research, when she writes that the ways in which we use film may 'cast their own shadows over the particular event' (1997:248).

During the fieldwork for this research I have sought permission before filming or taking photographs and have met with varied responses. At an extended *Mahasivaratri* festival in Leicester, the organisers agreed to my filming the event and encouraged me to take up an advantageous position in the hired school hall in order to capture close-ups of the participants of the *puja*. But, having set up the video camera on a tripod with a clear view of the stage for the dance performances, several of the organisers walked or stood in front of the camera whilst filming, unintentionally blocking the view and thus spoiling the recording. When I sent a copy of the film to the main organiser with a letter of thanks, he replied advising me that he could not make use of the film as it was. In his eyes, I had neglected to film the whole event as I had concentrated on the dance sequences and not recorded the complete festival which had run for nearly seven hours. This indicates the disparity in the expectations held by both parties and the different roles being played – that of a religious devotee organising a major festival and that of the 'outsider' ethnographer. My choice in filming was a selective one, focussing on the dance performances and only part of the *puja*. So in this case the recording was dictated by the ethnographer and not by the participant/organiser. Marcus Banks writes of similar problems that were encountered by a photographer recording an Otavalo Indian in Ecuador weaving his raw wool. On being shown the photographs, the 'weaver was not pleased and considered that the photographs had shown him to be a poor weaver' (Banks 2001: 117). The weaver then insisted that photos were re-done, and this time, he dictated precisely which ones should be taken.

I had wanted too to film the *Navratri Garba* practices of the women at the *Swaminarayan* temple in London, but was prevented in doing so by the political turn of events in Gujarat, India in 2002, which resulted in a violent attack on one of the *Swaminarayan*

temples there. After this, tight security was imposed at the London temple and no cameras were allowed. Permission could be sought to film, but was needed well in advance of the event and as the festival was fast approaching, this was not possible. At the Murugan Tamil temple in East Ham, the Bharatanatyam dance teacher allowed me to film her classes with the condition that it was not to be shown to any other dance teachers. It was only to be used for my research. It revealed an unexpected sensitivity to how other Bharatanatyam teachers would view her teaching and the standard of her students. At other festival events in this temple I have been encouraged to film everything taking place, and particularly the body piercing of the men carrying *Kavadi*, where I was pushed to the front and urged on to take close-ups. Everywhere that recordings have been made as part of the research methodology, copies have been given to the people concerned.⁵ In some cases, the video copy of the event has been used in a feedback situation, where I was able to interview one of the men carrying *kavadi* after the temple festival. He was keenly interested to see the film, particularly the body piercing he had undergone and it enabled a much fuller conversation to take place between us. As we watched, more details of the event were clear to both of us, and my interviewee recalled aspects of the festival and of his feelings that had been forgotten. This exemplifies Sarah Pink's point that 'showing video footage to an informant can also become part of the research process' (2001:89), and proves that it can be an invaluable tool when used with discretion.

Many of the interviews have been recorded on audio tape or video, which has enabled a more accurate record of conversation and movement to be gathered. This is clearly of significant import to enable the voices from the field to be heard more directly and precisely. Transcribing from recordings is a notoriously time-consuming procedure, and interviewing whilst operating a video camera a precarious and challenging task, creating further difficulties for the researcher. There is too the additional factor that the presence of another person may alter the dynamics of the interview. The more informal interview can offer advantages in that unscheduled topics of conversation may arise which yield an unsuspecting amount of valuable information. In several of my semi-structured and more informal 'interviews' with dance practitioners, subjects ranging from the rivalry between

dance teachers and relationships in the dance world, to the vexed issues of funding arose spontaneously. These ‘free-flowing’ conversations often became sources of important ethnographic detail.

Most of interviews have been conducted in English except for one interview in Tamil with a Tamil priest (I had prepared questions which were translated to him and translated back for me). Although I have studied some Gujarati and am familiar with Sanskrit, more time would have been required for a colloquial competence to be achieved in Gujarati, or to study in depth a complex language such as Tamil. The time constraints of the project’s funding did not allow for this. English was the first language of the second and third generation Asian community members interviewed and therefore preferable to them, although some older Gujarati respondents in Leicester were not fully confident in their written English for questionnaires. In these cases, we completed the questionnaires together as part of an informal interview.

3.5:2 Negotiation and access

A field of research does not exist already as a pristine, new space unsullied by other factors and therefore has to be created by the researcher. It must be discovered, constructed, unlocked, and its entry negotiated by various means (Amit 2000:6). My research has been dependant on various gate-keepers for initial entry into some of the communities, and on several occasions, entry was made possible through friends who were regular attendees at the particular temple being visited. After the initial introductions and first visits I was able to return on my own. Access to the London Tamil Shree Ghanapathy Temple was relatively easy as the temple takes pride in being a community where numerous visits from schools and colleges are welcomed each year, and they are active participants in local interfaith organisations. At my initial visit to their Founder’s Day celebrations, other visitors included a neighbouring vicar and his wife, and a BBC producer recording a programme on faith for Radio 4. Persistence and patience were required to follow up the visit, and to gain more details of future events, the history of the temple and general information. Several phone calls were needed to make one appointment; arranged interviews were cancelled on more than one occasion;

the temple website was not updated or completed; and notices in the temple were in Tamil. As more visits were made, confidence grew on both sides and access both to the site itself and to information was easier.

My own background in South Asian dance⁶ provided many contacts for research in the Hindu community, particularly in London and in terms of dance. Visits to two other London Tamil temples were negotiated through a close friend, a Hindu woman of Guyanese origin who has contact with the priests and organisers at these two sites, and who accompanied me on several of the visits. This was most helpful as these two communities are mainly Tamil speaking. The *karnatic* music teacher at the Bhavan Centre, Sivasakti Sivanesan, introduced me to the senior priest at the London Murugan Temple, and assisted me in interviewing him in Tamil. In London, fieldwork was facilitated also by the many existing contacts I have amongst South Asian dancers, musicians, teachers and colleagues working in the arts; informal interviews and conversations related to the research topic with them have been invaluable in setting directions, and clarifying details. In contrast, apart from one contact in Leicester with an ex-pupil of mine studying at De Montfort University who introduced me to the *Swaminarayan* Hindu temple she attended, all other communications with the Hindu community in Leicester had to be initiated and negotiated. Leicester is a relatively small city so this was easier than envisaged, as people working within the Asian arts – dancers, teachers, musicians, and administrators – are part of a close community and often attend similar events where contacts have been exchanged. In general, people were helpful, open and generous with their time on hearing of my interest and the details of the research.

When does entry into the field start? And when does it end? These questions are particularly relevant when practising fieldwork at home, as the entries and exits in the field may be more frequent and for shorter periods than a long study ‘abroad’. Visits may be sporadic, or only at festival time, and some interviews conducted by phone rather than in person. I have attended for example, the major annual Hindu festivals at each field site at least once, some twice, and some for several visits. Therefore long periods of

immersion do not occur and this has its own drawbacks. Access may have to be re-negotiated, and the details of the field quickly and efficiently re-connected with so that time is not lost. Several months had lapsed between visits to one of the London temples, during which I had spent time writing up the data collected, continued research through reading and made visits elsewhere. On returning, the dance teacher I had worked with and with whom I had discussed issues in detail had stopped teaching to have a child, and another teacher taken her place. A new situation then needed to be encompassed and further relationships developed. Additionally, whilst in the field, data is not always being collected, therefore the edges of such research are blurred, and the field of research less defined.

Other factors are at work to prejudice the field; some hidden and some overt. Constraints of time, available finances and resources, political mediations, and the background and beliefs of the researcher him or herself all exert an influence over access to and work in the field. Even the very presence of the fieldworker in the field has an influence. As Sklar points out, 'The writer's cultural knowledge is as much a part of the relationship between researcher and dancer as the dancer's' (Sklar 1991:8). Fieldwork requires a familiarity and intimacy which as Amit states, has to be exploited as an investigative tool (2000:2). No other scholarly research depends on the establishing of close relationships so heavily as does fieldwork and the social nature of such work means that it is not under the control of the researcher. 'Where, when, how and whom we encounter can never be subject to our firm control' (ibid:16). It is an 'ad hoc' approach, entirely dependent upon people and the complexity of the researcher's relationships with them. It is, in fact, a very human process. Time and tolerance are also essential tools to be added to the equation, as access to the field site can never be taken for granted and more often, has to be constantly re-negotiated. Moving between two different communities (the researcher's own and the field being studied), and the reliance for access on gatekeepers can cause unwanted stresses and strains. Hours of patient, meticulous observation that is not just looking or watching, has to be supported by carefully constructed questions that can provide insights into why, and not just what. It is a process of trial and error and can

create anxieties and doubts on the part of the researcher as well as insights and understandings.

Fieldwork cannot be willed into happening. Inevitably it proceeds by fits and starts. Anxieties and doubts beset you, no matter how good your language skills, how thorough your background reading, how extensive your ethnographical experience in other cultures.

Jackson 1995:21

It has also become clear that fieldwork undertaken in the Asian community has its own rhythm, a rhythm that does not yield to timings imposed from outside and mostly goes at its own somewhat leisurely pace. A desire for instant results can lead to frustrations and irritations, so waiting and acceptance have had to be part of the equation. Fieldwork too, has no shortcuts. Understanding can be a product less of one's methodology than one's mastery of basic social skills, calling for fortitude and a generous spirit. As Felicia Hughes-Freeland comments, 'traditional participant-observation is determined by a process of planning and intention, which is disrupted by accidents and enhanced by serendipity' (1999:120).

3.5:3 Ethical matters

Working so closely with people in the field brings numerous ethical considerations and responsibilities. How do you finally leave the field having gained people's confidences and established close relationships, and do you name those people you have worked with? Questions relating to who is to read what is written finally and whether it is available for the people in the field to peruse (which it probably will be, given today's increased communications) have to be asked, and the influences of such a situation assessed. Decisions have to be made about whether the final text will be made subject to the scrutiny of the informants if it is to be published. There are cases of ethnographers working in the field who became subject to the most intense criticism from their respondents after publishing books containing intimate details of the community life (Davis 1993). This was having gained unreserved assurances from all who were interviewed that their comments could be used fully, and with all participators remaining anonymous in print. Others record how informants were disappointed with the end product, perhaps a jargon-filled dissertation, which they had not expected (Glazier 1993). Often, understandings of the purpose and nature of the ethnographic work differ widely

between the ethnographer and the people studied, a major barrier being that 'even in the most literate of societies, few informants understand the nature and goals of ethnographic research' (ibid: 39). Brettell suggests that there is a need to 'fully address and explore the question of for whom we are writing, and how we write for whom we write' (1993:102); unless that is done there will continue to be misunderstandings when ethnographies are read, particularly by the people who are the subject of the writing. Showing my Tamil chapter to a senior member of the London Tamil community provoked no response at all, and I wondered in fact if he had actually read it.⁷

On two occasions during my visits to temples requests were made for me to teach dance on a regular and voluntary basis, or to perform at a forthcoming function. In Leicester I was asked to give advice to South Asian dancers on career decisions and future applications for funding, as well as commenting in writing on a short book on Hinduism written by one of the Gujarati Hindu Association. These situations reveal a view held by these informants of the researcher as an expert, or as an 'official historian' (Buckland 2001:11). This not only illustrates the current economic atmosphere relating to dance in a temple or religious context –requests are made but no payment is available - but also reveals that people in the field can hold very different agendas about the role of the researcher. This can cause certain difficulties in communication and understanding. The SADiB report found that some of the informants interviewed were suspicious of the motives of the researchers. Magdalen Gorringer, (a white Tamil speaker), in her enquiries as part of SADiB's research into dance practices, found that the teachers at one of the Tamil schools 'wanted an assurance that nothing bad would be written about them – and asked why we were interested in them - they minded their own business and we should mind ours!' (Grau 2002:24).

There is a need, too, to be sensitive to the culture of the community being studied, and in particular to the religious beliefs and practices so that actions and speech do not transgress areas of behavioural taboo. In Hindu practice, shoes must not be worn in the temple (and not usually in devotees' homes); only the right hand is used for certain parts of the ritual in *puja*, and for eating; and the devotees always circumambulate the deities

in a clockwise direction. Much of this is, of course, unspoken. The ethnographer has, over a period of time, to gain understanding from the inside: the ambiguous gestures, the silent protocols, the symbolic codes that an ‘outsider’ does not know – these he or she must unravel to gain deeper experience and knowledge. Even the desire to discover or attribute the ‘meaning’ of an event or actions may be misguided; there is not usually one single meaning to be revealed. When asked, people often respond, ‘It’s just what we do’.

Sensitivity is required too in dress code. I wore a *salwar kamiz*⁸ rather than western dress to most of the functions attended, but in the Tamil temples, the women dress in *saris*, and for festivals, the *saris* are silk and brightly coloured. Conspicuous gold jewellery is worn, with flowers adorning the hair. In making arrangements to attend the August chariot festival (2003) at the Tamil Ghanapathy Temple, I was asked by the organiser if I would wear a *sari*. A generous offer was made to lend me one and to give help putting it on by attending one of the devotee’s homes before the celebrations began. In fact it was not necessary as I have several of my own and can, with a little help, manage to dress in it. My new acquaintances at the temple were delighted, and expressed their pleasure at the effort made. Similarly, when joining the *Navratri* festivities in both London and Leicester, generous proposals were made to loan Gujarati outfits⁹ and jewellery for the occasion, and great care was given in selecting the right items for me and in helping me dress.¹⁰ At the event, there was a marked appreciation by people attending on seeing a westerner dressed and fully participating in playing *Garba* and *Raas*¹¹ (see below).

3.5:4 Sensitivities of language

Language plays a significant part in the transition of understanding as much of the ‘inside’ information is carried in the language used by the community. Detailed and close listening, as well as analysis of the language of the field are essential, with the researcher being guided by the concepts and terminology used rather than importing preconceptions of the meanings and functions of the dance and movement practices. James Spradley (1979) writes of how careful the ethnographer has to be even when the informants appear to speak in an identical language. His research, investigating the lives of male alcoholics living on skid row, revealed that they had their own rich

language full of meaning and concepts unknown to the outsider, and that in addition to this, they had ‘acquired an ability I [Spradley] call *translation competence*. This is *the ability to translate the meanings of one culture into a form that is appropriate to another culture*.’ (1979: 19) [original italics].

Cowan, writing of her dance research in northern Greece noted the frequent use of metaphors of dance to communicate the different aspects of communal social life. This has arisen from the fact of the dance’s centrality ‘within ritual and secular celebrations’ (1990:20) in Greece. She comments that ‘just as dance is used metaphorically to talk about the ambiguities of social action and experience in everyday life, so is talk about actual dancing preoccupied with these same ambiguities’ (ibid). So the Greek phrase ‘If you enter the dance, you must dance’ carries levels of meta-meaning understood by the community, but not necessarily by outsiders.

Experience from observation and participation in the Hindu *Navratri* festival had shown me not to use the word ‘dance’ for the folk movements practised. One ‘plays’ the steps of *Garba* (circular movements) and *Raas* (stick movements) – in Gujarati the expression is ‘garba ramavo’. ‘Are you playing *Garba* tonight?’ is the question asked. The word ‘dance’ in Gujarati refers to dance forms located in night-clubs or dance as part of a staged performance, and is considered an inappropriate movement term for a religious occasion, my Gujarati acquaintances told me (author’s fieldnotes 19.10.02). The fact that ‘movement systems are constituted in discursive practice [and] word and action are thus dynamic communicative knowledges with which the ethnographer continually engages’ (Buckland 1999:7), emphasises the fundamental relationship between language and action which cannot be ignored. Varying accounts of the same event heard in informant interviews indicate how different meanings have been understood, revealing a type of ‘meta-language’ that communicates on different levels.

In addition, informants are not always able to translate their understanding and experience of movement forms into words, either because it is too closely a part of their world of experience or because the movements themselves seem to communicate more

accurately what they know. Dance is not usually a verbalised activity. 'It is our tradition, you know'; 'We have always done it like this' were some of the replies to Ronström's dance fieldwork with the Yugoslav community in Stockholm, statements that 'frequently belie the complexity and significance of the activity' (Ronström 1999:136). My questions to participants in the Hindu *Navratri* celebrations met with similar responses when asking about movements practised, 'I can't explain it, I just do it' said one (author's fieldnotes 19.10.02). These steps are assimilated unconsciously at a very early age, so people do not consider objectively the detail of the movements their bodies are making. Staal cites from his work among Hindu ritualists that there is only one answer to questions of why things are performed and what are their meaning – 'we act according to the rules because this is our tradition' (1989:116). It is what is done that is significant, not what is thought, believed or known at the time.

3.5:5 Attendance in the field

A further problematic area that emerges with particular ethnographic work and its aspect of participant/observer is the ability of the researcher to attend community functions as and when required. Amit (2000:3) describes this as a tension between the personal and professional aspects of fieldwork, based on the difficulty of the concept of total immersion when you are practising fieldwork at home. During the fieldwork, many of the events took place in the evenings and at weekends, a time when there were often other commitments and family needs. On some occasions, as researchers Jackson and Nesbitt (1993) found, it was problematic in deciding which of the many possible venues to visit. For example, a summer festival¹² took place at both the Tamil Shree Ghanapathy Temple (Wimbledon) and the Tamil Shri Kanagathurkkai Amman Temple (Ealing) in London at almost exactly the same time. Each festival ran every night for twenty-five evenings, culminating in a whole day of celebration where the main deity was paraded around the local streets on a wooden chariot (*ter*). Music and dance performances were an integral part of the whole event. Where should one attend to collect the most useful data? The previously mentioned *Navratri* celebrations, an essential part of Gujarati religious life, takes place in the autumn every night from about 8pm-12pm for ten consecutive nights. In London there was a choice of several different venues to attend,

and in Leicester, which is said to have the biggest *Navratri* celebrations outside of India there was also a choice of multiple venues. Can the fieldworker, working ‘at home’, manage to visit the event every night, and if so, at which venues, and in which city? In practice, much of the fieldwork research was dictated by what I could get to in terms of time, travel, access through gatekeepers, and in terms of stamina.

3.5:6 Politics and relations of power

All work in the field carries political and ethical dimensions, some of which have been highlighted above. Grau discusses the potent topic of the politics of fieldwork in terms of access and representation, ‘and within the field, in terms of interpersonal relationships’ (1999:165). She notes too how ‘fieldwork is inextricably enmeshed with relations of power’ (ibid:166). These factors of power and representation in the realm of fieldwork can be easily overlooked (see Hüwelmeier 2000), and Grau’s practical and realistic approach gives helpful direction to the new researcher setting out to practise fieldwork. Much of the detail given is immediately recognisable in this study: the unexpected dislocation and stress of working ‘at home’, the engaging with informants and the dependency upon them, the questions of politics in writing up one’s work such as ownership of material or use of scholarly jargon, and the expressing or concealing of facts from the fieldwork.

In this context, it has been essential to address the question of the power and ethnographic authority in practising fieldwork. Firstly, in terms of the acquisition of knowledge gained from the field –who is it for? How will it be used? Who will it benefit? These challenging questions have needed constant consideration, even though answers are not easy to find. The production of a written thesis is the first use of data collected, of benefit to the researcher in gaining further academic credentials. Secondly is the writing and presenting of papers at conferences and in journals, again of benefit to the researcher and the wider academic community. But how may ‘the research process and /or the product of the research concurrently benefit the community *and* enhance the researcher’s understanding’? (Frosch 1999:261). As Thomas points out, the researcher is the sole author and narrator of the ethnography, despite the collaborative nature of the

preceding fieldwork (Thomas 2003:71). The effect of this is to create an unbalanced equation, something that Andriy Nahachewsky attempted to attenuate during his fieldwork in Ukraine. He writes of how as a white, male professor, with the financial means to travel from Canada to a village in the Ukraine to conduct research, he was in a position of power, and how ‘usually, I tried to level the playing field...by giving the villagers voice in directing the conversation...by attending to their questions, interests and requests’ (1999:184). Although he felt it was a clumsy attempt, it was clear that by showing interest in the villagers’ lives, their dance practices and their knowledge, ‘we validated our interviewees and endowed them with status among their peers’ (ibid). So the question of how the community being researched may benefit is multi-layered, examples of which are manifold. For instance, Buckland (1999:203), was asked to be the ‘official historian’ of the dance group she researched, and was able too to preserve a record of the group’s dances on video for future needs; Grau (1999:164) was referred to by the Aboriginal Tiwis for clarification of their family relationships through her extensive genealogical work, and too, deposited her annotated fieldnotes at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies for use by the Tiwi people and for future researchers. At times, the benefit for those subject to the research may remain hidden, to emerge later in ways unforeseen at the time.

3.6 Ethnography and beyond

In using an ethnographic perspective to examine the dance and movement practices of a community, that is, ‘the close study of culture as lived by particular people, in particular places, doing particular things at particular times’ (Van Maanen 1995:23), the ethnographer focuses on dance as a kind of cultural knowledge. Using the various ethnographic practices previously described, he or she has to tread a delicate path of negotiation and persistence in building relationships with and being present in the community being studied. The final stage of the ethnography concentrates on translating that evidence into text – a written representation of that culture and its meaning as seen through the form of its movement practices and dance traditions. As Van Maanen points out, ethnography ‘is the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others

through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others', but yet it 'serves as the basis for ...understanding within and across a society' (1988:ix).

The following chapter discusses the ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Leicester and presents the details of the results in the field, revealing through an examination of the dance practices of the Hindu Gujarati community there the knowledge that expresses the religious and cultural beliefs of that community. I examine the background to the settlement of Gujarati Asians in Leicester, tracing the history of their dance practices in the UK and describing in detail the contemporary scene of participatory dance performance and the teaching of dance.

Notes:

¹ The related term 'ethnology' is a broad synonym for social and cultural anthropology, and in northern Europe is used to describe the discipline of 'own-society anthropological studies' (Barnard and Spencer 1998:207).

² The *Swaminarayan* temple is the exception to this, as discussed in Chapter Four. As a woman, I would not be allowed to attend the men-only gatherings, and am not permitted to see or talk to the priests (*swamis*).

³ The terms 'emic' and 'etic' indicate two contrasting levels of data or methods of analysis. They originate from Kenneth Pike's work of the 1950s in which linguistics was closely related to behavioural psychology. 'Etic models are held to be universal; emic models are culture-specific' (Barnard and Spencer 1998:180). See Farnell (1999b:354-55) for greater detail of Kaeppler's work in this field of analysis.

⁴ The Chicago School of Ethnography emerged out of the University of Chicago's sociology faculty and was active from 1917-1942. The Chicago ethnographers developed a 'hands-on' method of research, and 'they generated a vital picture of urban life grounded in local studies and a sympathetic eye on human behaviour' (Deegan 2001:22).

⁵ Pink however, criticises the notion of compensating the informants through 'giving back', stating that it does not make the research any less exploitative. She suggests instead that collaborative projects can be successful in empowering informants and enabling the agency to be shared (2001:44).

⁶ I have trained in two classical South Asian dance styles, Bharatanatyam, and Kathak, and have for many years attended performances and become well acquainted with South Asian dance practitioners and teachers in the UK and elsewhere. I have known two of the more prominent London South Asian dance teachers, Pushkala Gopal and Unnikrishnan, both professional

dancers, for over twenty years. Further research was undertaken for an MA thesis on South Asian dancer Ram Gopal (see David 2001).

⁷ This man was interested to read what I had written as I had quoted both from our interviews and from a book he had authored. The first copy of my chapter sent to him was lost and a second copy sent. But he made no comment on being questioned about the text nor asked for any corrections. It was difficult to ascertain whether he was content with the material written, or content that the Tamil community in London was featuring so prominently in a research project, or whether he had not in the end had the time or inclination to read the chapter.

⁸ *Salwar kamiz* is an outfit worn by many Hindu women, consisting of pyjama-type trousers and a long loose-fitting tunic. It is called *chuddidar* by the Tamil community.

⁹ The outfit for *Navratri* is called *chaniyo* (Gujarati). It is a full-length, wide, decorative skirt, worn with a short blouse (*choli*) and a long, full, matching scarf (*chunri*). I too have several of my own outfits which I have worn to *Navratri* events, but have borrowed them also on some occasions.

¹⁰ See Tarlo (1996), Chapter Six for further discussion on the issue of dress. Social and economic status are still today revealed in the jewellery and clothing of Indian women (Waghorne 2004:254).

¹¹ *Garba*, the circular steps practised by women at *Navratri* in honour of the goddess is in fact the plural of *garbo*, the name of an earthenware pot with holes, used usually as a lamp. *Raas*: Sanskrit for 'essence' or 'flavour', but used to describe the circle movements associated with Krishna. Here, it signifies a stick 'dance' performed by both males and females, particularly at *Navratri*, using *dandiyas*, or short, decorated sticks.

¹² Summer festivals: These take place in the Tamil temples during July and August of each year. It is a time of cleansing and purification, and culminates in a *Ter* festival day, where the main deities are paraded in the local streets on wooden 'chariots'.

Part Two: UK Fieldwork –Leicester and London

CHAPTER FOUR: Leicester

4.1 Asian Leicester

In popular imagination Leicester is most commonly associated with its Asian community...Over the last fifty years the Asian community in Leicester has developed self-confidence and it can face the twenty-first century with a great optimism. Asian Leicester is likely to remain an outstanding example of diversity and ethnic plurality.

Martin and Singh 2002:7,14

We are rightly proud in Leicester of having found a way to combine East and West.

Devi 1996b:5

The history of the Asian community in Leicester with its particular immigration patterns and dominant groups has been well documented in recent years by sociologists, historians and educationalists (Marett 1989; Ballard 1994; Vertovec 1994, 1996; Martin and Singh 2002). The status of Leicester's Asian peoples as documented in the 2001 government census reveals that Leicester has the highest proportion of Indians¹ in the country – 25.7% (72,033), plus 5,516 'Other Asians' of its total population of 279,921, giving a total Asian population of approximately 36%. Hindus account for 14.7% (41,248) of that number, that is 1 in 7 of the population, Muslims number 11.0% (30,885) and Sikhs 4.2% (11,796).² The largest ethnic minority group in the East Midlands is Indian, and the region has the highest proportion of Hindus in England and Wales.³ Leicester's particular fusion of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and their respective histories accounts for the rather unusual characteristics of its Asian settlement – one where a relatively harmonious balance is actively pursued and sustained. It is worth noting that no category was offered in the 2001 census for the presence of Jains, who seem to have been subsumed under the classification of 'Hindu'; Banks (1991:227) offers a figure of around 1,200 Jain followers in 1982 in Leicester.

A contrasting picture is shown in other major UK cities hosting large Asian communities, where the different religious groups are represented in distinctly varied proportions. For example, the chart below reveals how Leicester’s Asian population is predominantly Hindu, whereas the city of Birmingham contains the seventh largest Muslim group in the UK with a population of over 140,033, and a relatively large Sikh community. In Coventry, the Sikh residents are the dominant Asian group by number, and Bradford has the fourth highest numbers of Muslims (75,188) in relation to its total population.

Group	LEICESTER	BIRMINGHAM	COVENTRY	LEEDS	BRADFORD	GREATER MANCHESTER
Hindu	41,248	19,358	7,757	4,183	4,457	17,260
Muslim	30,885	140,033	11,686	21,394	75,188	125,219
Sikh	11,796	28,592	13,960	7,586	4,748	3,720

Figure 8. Numbers of Asian communities in six major UK cities.
[Compiled from 2001Census details: Ann David]

Comments in the South Asian journal *Himal* state that areas such as Oldham, Burnley, Bradford and Leeds are less than three hours drive from Leicester, yet in 2001 were the scenes of violent race troubles between Asian youths. This is contrasted with the city of Leicester, which:

with the highest population percentage of non-whites in Britain and projected soon to become the first European city with a non-white majority, presents a rare picture of multicultural harmony. Indeed, its picture of ethnic co-existence has become the subject of study for many European cities with ethnically diverse populations.

Sonwalkar 2001:1

Authors Sills, Tarpey and Golding cite comments from respondents in their survey *Asians in an Inner City* (1983) that reinforce the view of Leicester as a secure and less

hostile environment in which to live. Asian people were asked why they had moved to Leicester, or continued to reside there. 'Indeed, in a number of instances safety was an important reason for moving to Leicester; some respondents cited racial harassment in other large cities such as London, Bradford, Blackburn and Nottingham' (ibid:39-40). Other detailed research through questionnaires in 1980 revealed 'approximately 87% of the minority households interviewed maintained that proximity to other Asians had influenced their choice of a family dwelling in Leicester' (Phillips 1981:106-107). Harald Tambs-Lyche (1980:52) quotes members of the Patel caste stating that Leicester was considered the most desirable place to live in the provinces.

Nearly thirty years have passed since Leicester saw racial tension of a different kind to that of the rioting of the summer of 2001. In the early to mid-seventies, a growth in National Front hostilities towards the incoming Asian population in Leicester manifested in an increasing support for its party, and in 1975 the Front gained 18% of the total votes in the local city elections. Confrontations between the National Front, the police, black and Asian people and anti-racist activists took place. The National Front's popularity, however, was to decline after the general elections of 1979. But the real picture was and still is a complex one, with evidence that some parts of the Asian and black communities remain wary of the image of Leicester as a peaceful, tolerant and racially harmonious provincial city. 'Racism was not, and is not, the monopoly of the National Front' (Westwood 1991:151). Indeed, after the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya, India in 1992 by Hindu nationalists, there were serious global repercussions. In Britain, 14 Hindu temples were petrol bombed, and attacks made on Hindu businesses, including those in Leicester (see Burlet and Reid, 1995 and Burlet 2001, for further detail). 1981 saw riots in the city when young people, both black and white, clashed violently with the police over such issues as racism, identity, and unemployment, as happened too in other UK locations. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the early part of the 1980s offered certain political and social changes in Leicester, with a 'new left' Labour party that promised commitment to the creation of a multiracial city, and offered funding for inner-city problems. By 1983, a City Council was formed that included nine Labour Asian councillors. The year 1987 saw further significant transformations - the election of Keith

Vaz in Leicester East, the first UK Asian MP since 1923, the City Council's development of a greater awareness and contact with the Asian community, and the growth of hundreds of Asian community associations.

Clearly, any view that perceives Leicester as a multicultural and multi-ethnic city must be careful to recognise also the complexity and variety of backgrounds, identities, religions, languages, social and cultural practices and business ethics of the Asian community there, as well as acknowledging the presence in the city of Afro-Caribbeans, Chinese, Poles, Ukrainians, Serbs, Lithuanians, and the Vietnamese. It is a multi-layered picture, not a simplistic model, and one that needs careful “unpacking” of multicultural contexts and minority group differentiation’ (Vertovec 1994:260). Vertovec warns of the tendency to gloss over detail with the term ‘multiculturalism’ in his analysis of Leicester’s Asian community:

In both academic and political discourses surrounding the topic of multiculturalism, various ethnic and racial groups are often talked about in sweeping terms without reference to important forms of differentiation between and among them, including differences of historical identities, cultural practices, modes of organisation, and aspects of power.

Vertovec 1994: 259

4.2 Asian history in Leicester

Although before the Second World War there was a small number of Asians resident in Leicester, the community began to increase after 1947, triggered by two key events. The first was India’s Independence and the partition of the Punjab between India and Pakistan. Both the displacement of these peoples, and secondly the British Nationality Act of 1948 giving Commonwealth citizens the right to move to the ‘mother country’, brought Indians to Britain. By 1951, the Asian population in the city numbered around 624 (Martin and Singh 2002:8); Marett gives the number as 700 (1989:1). There was a significant need for manual workers in the various local industries- textiles, hosiery, boots and shoes – and these jobs were filled by male Asian workers mainly from the Punjab, Gujarat and Pakistan, many following the common model of intended temporary migration. Their initial aims were economic, ‘to earn and save as much as possible as

quickly as possible before returning home' (Ballard 1994:12), and they were supported by the patterns of chain migration, leading to groupings of friends and relatives from specific parts of the sub-continent. As numbers grew rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s, and gradually wives were brought over from India, the pattern changed and homes were established.⁴ This was a time when Asians began to make an emotional and financial commitment for a longer-term stay in Britain. Asian businesses sprang up to meet the special needs of the communities in clothing, food products and entertainment, and

many Asians gravitated to Leicester from other less prosperous centres, for example, large numbers of Gujaratis left parts of Birmingham and Coventry to join friends and relatives in the city.

Phillips 1981:103.

The early Sikh presence from the Punjab in Leicester showed evidence of establishing more permanent roots by the founding of a *gurdwara*⁵ in the early 1960s and a *bhangra*⁶ club in 1965. Ballard, writing in 1994, notes that 'around two-thirds of Britain's South Asians are of Punjabi ancestry' (1994:19).

The second key event was the expulsion of Indians from East Africa. The late 1960s and early 1970s marked a profound transformation of Leicester's Asian population with the arrival of some 30 - 40,000 immigrants from the East African states of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Sometimes described by commentators as 'twice-migrants', (a term taken from the title of Parminder Bhachu's book, *Twice Migrants*), as many had already migrated from India, these Asians originated mainly from the north-western Indian province of Gujarat. After one or two generations of settlement in East Africa, Idi Amin's increasingly hostile programme of Africanisation and the growing independence of these African states began to affect their lives. Many of those living in Kenya chose to withdraw in the late 1960s after Kenya's independence in 1964, and arrived in the UK with their funds, and their families, intact. In the first two months of 1968, 12,800 immigrants came to Britain, mostly from Kenya.⁷ This was an attempt to beat the controversial Immigration Act passed in March 1968 by the Labour government, which aimed to control immigrant entry into Britain, limiting it 'to those who had substantial connection with the United Kingdom by birth or descent' (Marett 1989:5), and stopping all automatic right of entry. But not all Kenyan exiles were successful in escaping. One

couple spent three months in the air, flying from airport to airport, having been refused their right of admission into Britain. (Verma 2002a: n.p.).

Those living in Uganda were less fortunate: the forced mass expulsion of these peoples (despite their Ugandan citizenship) meant they had to flee with very little, and they arrived in the UK, Canada, the USA and elsewhere as refugees. Despite widespread fear that Britain would be 'overrun', less than 30,000 Ugandan Asians arrived in 1972, of whom one in five came to Leicester (Marett 1989:167). Such was the concern in Leicester before their arrival that the City Council paid for advertisements in the *Ugandan Argos* newspaper in September 1972, stating that housing, places in schools, and social and health services in Leicester were stretched to the limits. The final wording of the advert read: 'In your own interests and those of your family you should accept the advice of the Uganda Resettlement Board and not come to Leicester' (ibid:39). Only as recently as October 2002, Leicester City Council has apologised for these advertisements, calling them a 'mistake' (www.bbc.co.uk accessed 29.10.2002).⁸ In the present climate of civic self-esteem in their relatively harmonious multicultural population, the City Council publishes its public documents in English and four South Asian languages - Punjabi, Gujarati, Urdu, Bengali- (as well as Chinese and Somali) and the 'Welcome to Leicester' sign at the main railway station displays these Asian languages too. The main daily Leicester newspaper, the *Leicester Mercury*, which supported the City Council's unwelcoming attitude at the time, now publishes an Asian edition.

4.3 Leicester's Gujaratis

The majority of Leicester's large Hindu population is of Gujarati origin, which as I go on to argue, lends a very particular flavour to the dominant aspects of social and religious life, cultural transmission, and business practices of the Hindu community in Leicester and impacts directly on the dance practices researched. Figures quoted by Mattausch (1998) estimate that the East African Gujarati community accounts for three-fifths of the British Gujarati population, the total number being over half a million people. Earlier figures in 1983 (cited in Vertovec 1994) show that 90% of all the Hindus in Leicester were Gujarati-speaking. Not only did the arrival of the mainly Gujarati East African

settlers in Leicester influence the financial and business practices of the already existing Asian community, but their presence greatly affected the spatial and demographic character of the city, as well as the social and religious practices undertaken. The wealth that many of the Kenyan immigrants brought with them, and their arrival in many cases as complete families, sometimes comprising three generations, enabled them to move quickly from rented to privately-owned property. This group was not forced to buy in the cheaper, more dilapidated housing of the inner city, as other Asian refugees were. As Deborah Phillips notes:

The East African refugees differed greatly from the immigrants who had hitherto settled in the city. Predominately from Gujarati trading communities, many came to Leicester equipped with entrepreneurial skills, a good education and some knowledge of English... Their initial demands for housing were therefore substantially different from predecessors.

Phillips 1981:108

The East African Asians also brought with them a considerable background of experience in business and commerce, and soon 'began to make an important contribution to the Leicester economy as entrepreneurs, helping to create a distinct ethnic business sector.' (Nash and Reeder 1993:85). In keeping with the tradition and origins of the Gujaratis, the focus of this commerce has been in general retailing and the wholesale distribution of items such as food and clothing. Gujarati businesses have continued to provide for the particular needs of the Asian community, and in the retail area have diversified into jewellery, the travel industry, plus other service facilities including property, financial and legal work, banks and car sales. The 'Golden Mile' of Leicester's Belgrave Road is known throughout the Midlands as a focus for good, but competitively priced Asian goods and services, attracting Asian families from other cities all over Britain, and advertised as a tourist attraction on Leicester city council's website.

KEY

1. Shree Jalaram Prarthana Mandal
2. De Montfort University
3. Jain Centre
4. De Montfort Hall
5. Centre for Indian Classical Dance (CICD)
6. Shri Swaminarayan Mandir
7. Abbey Park
8. Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre
9. Cossingham Park
10. Shree Sanatan Mandir
11. Ramgarhia Community Centre
12. Shaswat Academy for Music and Performing Arts (SAMPA)
13. Belgrave Road - 'The Golden Mile'
14. Gujarat Hindu Association
15. Rushey Mead School

LEICESTER

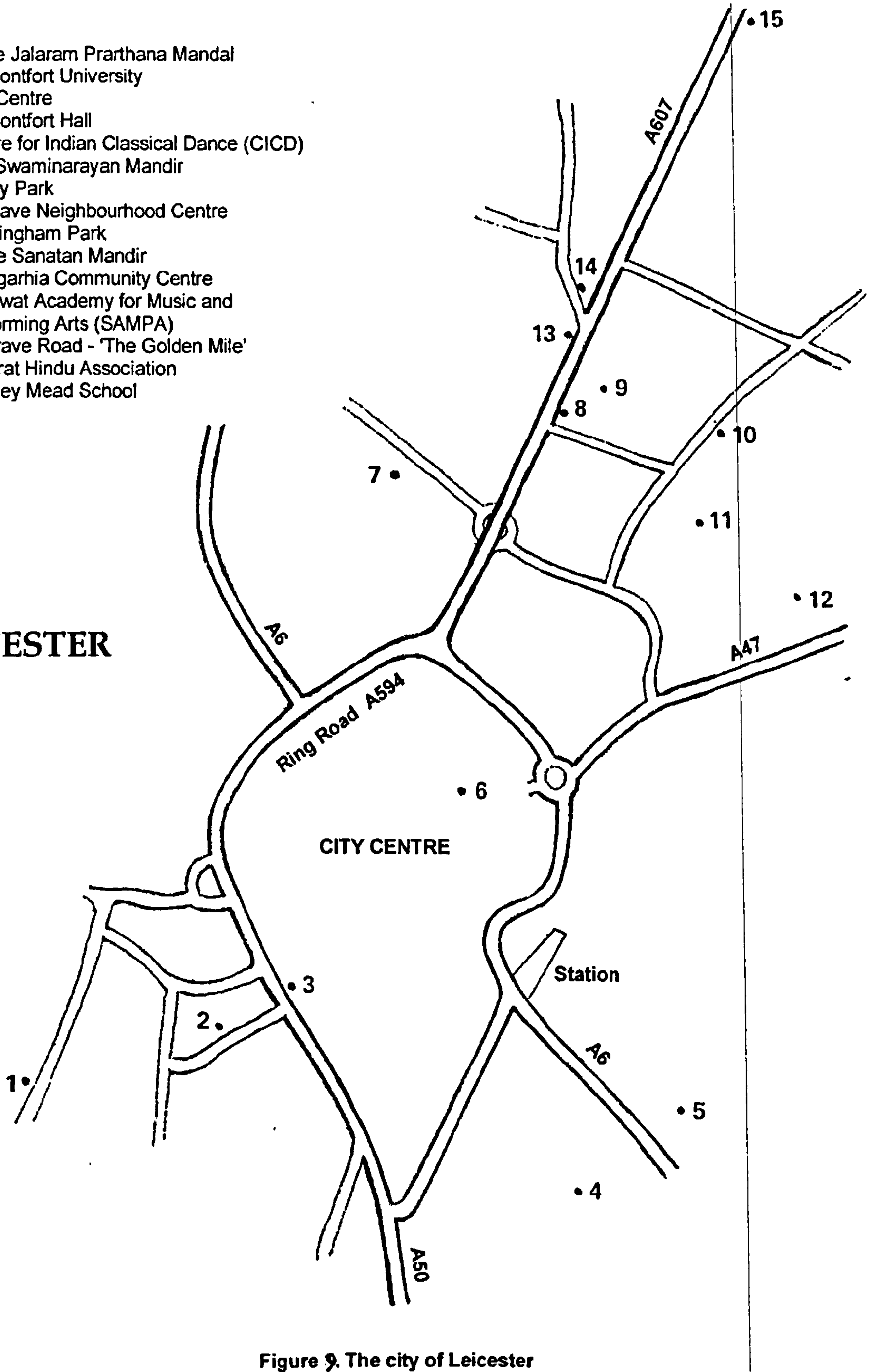


Figure 9. The city of Leicester

In 2004, there were over 10,000 registered Asian businesses in Leicester, many formed in the 1980s when there was a slump in the major manufacturing industries.

Contemporary Leicester boasts some of the most successful Asian businesses in Great Britain and many of them have overseas trading links, particularly with Europe, South Asia and North America.

Martin and Singh 2002:13

Writing in 1994, Rachel Dwyer confirmed that the Gujaratis accounted for the most prosperous section of Britain's Asian population and that over 100 Gujarati millionaires were resident in the UK (1994:183).

The earlier survey conducted in 1981 by Sills et al, however, provides evidence at that time to dispel any myths of the alleged wealth and prosperity of Leicester's Asian community, revealing that there were then high levels of unemployment, low wages and a significant dependence on social security compared to the white community. Many highly educated and well-experienced Asians had to take up employment on a scale far below their qualifications. Yet, as often is the case, the picture is a complex one.

Information from surveys and census details can be misleading in representing the whole of the Asian community in Leicester, as this 'population includes some of the least and most successful minority groups' (Vertovec 1994:262). As previously mentioned, the difference in origins (that is, direct early migrants from India; East African refugees; Pakistanis and Bangladeshis), the contrasting religious faiths, language, caste and customs create a multi-dynamic 'community', and one that cannot be examined or considered simply as a single, homogenous unit. The Gujaratis, for example, who have migrated directly from India had come mainly from rural backgrounds, and did not arrive, for the most part, with any degree of competence in English, unlike their Gujarati East African counterparts with their more sophisticated survival skills. Marett (1989:170) points out that despite the successes of the latter group, the elite of the East African professionals had migrated to Canada (as part of the Commonwealth), having been selected carefully by Canadian immigration teams sent to Kampala in advance of the exodus. She also comments that 'the multi-millionaires of Uganda settled in London' (ibid:170), leaving the middle and lower middle workers to come to Leicester. This

factor has clearly influenced dance practices, in terms of what is selected for transmission and why, as will be discussed subsequently.

Bhavin Thanki, a Gujarati who runs a successful Asian restaurant in south-west London, offering African-influenced Gujarati cuisine, was interviewed in 2000 for a Refugee Arts Initiative sponsored by London Arts. His grandfather had left Gujarat for Uganda in the late 1920s, and set up three shops selling sweets and savouries. He describes common aspects of the Gujarati ethos:

Asian communities, particularly Gujarati [sic], are very approachable. Because Gujarati philosophy is always to mix with other cultures easily without causing any offence, taking in the best of everything. And always, before a person can get something, he has to give something back. And that way it is always a hardworking community. A key to success is that they believe in education and hard work.

Thanki, interviewed in Alibhai-Brown and Reinhardt 2002:18

Tambs-Lyche too, in his case study of Gujarati Patidars⁹ living in London, discusses the importance of business in the Asian men's lives, writing that 'this identification with business is, it seems, something typical of Gujaratis, while not usual among Punjabis.' (1980:8). He notes that when other men visited the family where he had lodgings, the talk would be consistently relating to business. As an outsider, it appeared to him like a kind of ritual:

As new business plans came up, the discussion going on and on, it seemed to me clear that a man's prestige was very definitely connected with the wealth of ideas he was able to put forward during such talks. To be able to talk intelligently about business, showing initiative and enterprise, was the way of presenting a self to the audience which would gain immediate respect.

Tambs-Lyche 1980:7

The Gujaratis are known too, not only for their business acumen, but for their love of religion, which forms an important and significant dimension of their everyday life. This is particularly evident in the first generation settlers in the UK. The establishing of social groups, of religious practices and of cultural life is a high priority of immigrant groups in settling in a new country, a factor well identified by commentators and historians.

Traumas of immigration, dislocation and rupture of settled family life create the need for

spiritual and social stability and support, and for many migrant Hindus, the temple 'is no longer just a centre for devotion, but is an oasis of Indian culture in an alien environment, and a focus for social and recreational life' (Jackson 1981:65). Jatinda Verma's comprehensive radio documentary on *Asian Diaspora* (2002b) refers to the Asians working for long periods in the United Arab Emirates, whose lack of family draws them to the ISKCON¹⁰ temple there. 'The society [ISKCON] and its members is a very nice way to substitute the grandparents and the other relatives that we miss back in India' state the devotees interviewed by Verma. Another Asian couple, with a young family, spoke of their concerns for the transmission of culture to their children; they attended the temple 'to get involved with spiritual activities' and fill the vacuum experienced. As Verma makes clear, 'Culture is the blanket that every migrant wraps him or herself in, and the maintenance of culture on foreign soil can be problematic' (ibid).

The East Africa Gujaratis had established strong practices of mainly Vaishnavite¹¹ temple worship in East Africa through their caste organisations, and were therefore confident and organised in establishing the same in the UK. As the families were becoming established, the pressing need was to stabilise family life and expose the children to their own socio-cultural and religious traditions. Ritual activity took place both within the domestic setting and also in rented halls for the larger festivals, before any specific Hindu temples were established. The first public Hindu temple was created in Leicester in 1969 in a private house in Cromford Street, and remains today a thriving temple.¹² The latest survey carried out in 2004 by the Leicester Council of Faiths indicated there were twenty-two Hindu temples or centres where public Hindu worship takes place in the city.¹³ These include two *Swaminarayan*¹⁴ centres and an ISKCON temple. All the Hindu temples/centres follow the Vaishnava tradition although some describe their temples being of *Sanatan*¹⁵ faith. None of these temples has been purpose-built. The trend has been to convert from other buildings, although two groups, the Shree Jalaram Prarthna Mandal and the main *Swaminarayan* group are now building new temples. No south Indian temples of the Saivite tradition exist in the city, and the only religious Tamil group included in the survey is a Christian Baptist one. There are seven Sikh gurdwaras, and around twenty-one Muslim mosques which includes four Shia and the remainder of Sunni

faith (Stokes 2004). The considerable size of the Hindu population in Leicester has enabled the different caste communities to establish their own temples, rather than merging financial and community resources with other groups to purchase and support a temple that embraces disparate groups, as has happened in other cities, such as Coventry (Jackson 1981) and Leeds (Knott 2000a). Dwyer, in her study of Gujarati life, describes the important dimension of religious practice in their lives, and of their impressive organisation of their temples worldwide:

No longer content with converting disused Christian churches into their places of worship, most of the huge diversity of sects and caste-based communities into which the Gujaratis are divided have raised the money needed to construct purpose-built temples – some on a spectacular scale. While their spires and flags have brought new forms of architecture to many British cities, the rituals and festivities performed there now reproduce almost the entire range of Hindu belief and practice.

Dwyer 1994:165

The conversion of old buildings into Hindu temples raises problems regarding the use of space, as ancient architectural rules that codify the building of temples (see Chapter Six) stipulate the correct use of space, the correct height of the building and, most importantly, the correct direction for the deities to face. In many older buildings used as temples, these codes have had to be ignored or compromised. With the building of new temples in India, the USA, and now in the UK, other factors are influencing the designs, such as the inclusion of more light and space for the developing form of congregational worship. Community halls (for meditation, weddings, cultural and language classes), dining areas and large kitchens, and auditorium are being incorporated too into the designs of the diaspora temples. The first Vaishnava Hindu temple to be built in the UK according to traditional practices was the *Swaminarayan* Temple in Neasden, north London which took three years to build and opened in 1995. It now plays host to over 50,000 devotees at special festival times (see Hardy 1995).¹⁶

In all aspects of the practice of Hinduism, it is problematic to make distinctions between religious, social and cultural practices, as Hinduism encompasses a complete approach to life relating to social class, earning a living, family, politics, diet amongst other things, as well as the western view of religion. It incorporates a great range of beliefs and practices,

and has no strong tradition of corporate worship. Practice is more important than beliefs, as ‘what a Hindu does is more important than what a Hindu believes’ (Flood 2002:12). This defining characteristic of Hinduism allows it to be classified by Catherine Bell as orthopraxic – as a religion that puts an emphasis ‘on correct performance of behavioural responsibilities’ rather than ‘correct belief in theological doctrines’ (1997:191). Hinduism is known too for its qualities of tolerance, flexibility and adaptability and it does not maintain the polarity between the sacred and the secular as is seen in western thought. As Flood states:

The sacred exists entirely within culture. The categories of the sacred and the everyday are not substantive...but relational; they change according to circumstances and situation. There is nothing in Hinduism which is inherently sacred.

Flood 2002:9

4.4 Influences on Hindu worship in the UK

The growth of Hindu temples in the UK is itself an interesting and revealing phenomenon, as Hindu worship does not require of its devotees regular attendance at the temple. Private or domestic worship before a shrine in the home is the main feature of daily worship, whilst collective or congregational worship at the temple tends to be for festival occasions, or Hindu holy days. Congregational worship, however, has developed in temples in the UK because of the more obvious needs of immigrant communities to meet and socialise, and weekly gatherings for worship are now quite common. The powerful *Swaminarayan* Hindu Mission holds weekly *satsangas*¹⁷ at its temples that are attended by hundreds of devotees. Classes in religious education are offered to all age groups, and all devotees are encouraged strongly to participate. Exams are taken in these subjects. This indicates a marked change from traditional patterns of worship in temples. Visiting the *Swaminarayan* group at their temple in Leicester one Friday evening, I attended the talk given by a visiting swami¹⁸ from the London Neasden temple who has special responsibility for the Leicester branch, and conducts worship every weekend. His ninety- minute long presentation in Gujarati presented the history of the founding swamis of the religion, with anecdotes from their lives and their teachings.

The swami’s words are interspersed with phrases in English, and by

the end, much of his talk is in English. He informs the gathering that he will give them a test on what he has covered; papers are given out to the two hundred or so devotees sitting cross-legged on the floor, and he asks them twenty questions regarding different aspects of his talk. Then, he chides them gently for not taking the exams on the doctrine of their teaching, saying the exams are easy. It's serious, but lightly presented, and with humour. He completes the presentation with an impressive computerised slide-show of various aspects of their guru and his teaching.

Author's fieldnotes: Leicester 15.2.02

Raymond Williams noted in 1984 that among the original Gujarati communities in East Africa, and the then-present ones in the US and in Great Britain, 'the largest and fastest growing religious group is the *Swaminarayan* religion' and he described this form of organised religion as 'being a major element preserving Gujarati identity and ideals against forces which would erode them' (1984:172-173). David Pocock (1976:348-349) also addresses the codified religious instruction and graded examination set up within the *Swaminarayan* movement, as given in the example above. The changes in the nature of Hindu worship in the UK are raised by Vertovec (1996:82) where he notes the apparent 'changes in the role and status of priests, and in the frequency and procedure of key rituals' in temple practice, and in Knott's examination of 'the creative process of transplantation' (1987:161) that reveals how devotees and priests alike adapt to the distinct features of practising Hinduism in the UK.

Pilgrimage too has now come to be part of UK Hindu practice. This important aspect of Hindu religious worship is directly related to sacred sites in India, some established over hundreds if not thousands of years. In the Hindu diaspora, the creation of sacred places for pilgrimage outside of the Indian subcontinent is a new phenomenon, perhaps revealing the more settled and established existence of many Hindu groups worldwide.¹⁹ One particular UK temple²⁰, set up in 1973 in a remote valley in Dyfed, Wales, called the *Community of the Many Names of God*, consists of three thriving Hindu Saivite temples with outbuildings (converted from two farms) that provide living accommodation for the *Guru* Subramaniam, his followers, and for those on pilgrimage. It 'has become an important pilgrimage centre, attracting up to 15,000 Hindus and other visitors annually' (Taylor 1987:100). Due to Subramaniam's close affiliation to the Sai Baba movement,

initially both Gujarati Hindus and Sri Lankan Tamils would make their pilgrimage there, itself an unusual phenomenon, although the temple is now more frequently visited by Sri Lankan Tamils (see Chapter Five, endnote 27). It has also, like the ISKCON organisation, attracted many European non-Hindu followers.

Not only do the temples in the UK have to cater for an Asian community that, as discussed previously, comprises of many quite different social and cultural groups with dissimilar histories, places of origin, languages, castes and cultural practices, there are also practical difficulties that impact on temple worship and the celebration of religious festivals. These include the colder climate of the UK, particularly when festivals fall in autumn or winter; the fact that many of the community are working full-time, including the women, making all-night worship problematic, and the discrepancies of the Hindu and the western calendar, so that festival celebrations may have to be held on the nearest weekend, rather than on the day itself. There is no doubt that the patterns of worship have changed dramatically in the UK, with Friday evenings and weekends being the most busy and popular time to visit the temple as it is more suitable to the UK working week. western festival days are also celebrated, such as New Year's day and Christmas. The prescribed form and structure of ritual practice, which Hindus have a duty to follow, is difficult enough to maintain precisely in India, and in Britain, these requirements can seem overwhelming. Knott gives an example from Leeds, where adaptation in temple worship has been very apparent:

In Leeds, for example, where the temple is situated in a Victorian stable building, where the ritual specialist only recently assumed the role of pandit, and where the Hindu calendar is set in the context of Christmas and the cold British winter rather than the Indian monsoon, traditional rules are hard to obey.

Knott 1987: 171-172

My Gujarati informants in Leicester often compared the *Navratri* celebrations in the UK to those they had experienced in India, citing the wonderful experiences of dancing all night, and out-of-doors in a warm atmosphere. Here, they spoke of being unable to attend all nine nights because of their full-time work, and of not being able to take the children except at weekends, due to the necessity for them to attend school the next morning after a very late night. They commented too on the cramped conditions of the

Navratri festivities in hired halls in Leicester, in contrast to the spacious, open-air events in India.

4.5 Hindu festival celebrations

Hindu religious festivals mark certain auspicious periods in the cycle of a year in an exuberant, colourful, noisy, joyous and often spontaneous outburst of faith and devotion to a deity. Huyler describes their importance in India:

For a country where much of the population lives near the poverty line, these festivals enable devotees to share in the wealth and glory of their Gods. In many ways community abundance, and its consequent reflection in the wealth and grandeur of its temples and festivals, is viewed as personal abundance...The more extravagant the festival, the better it is.

Huyler 1999:170

Festivals may take place for one day, or for several; they may require fairly simple preparation or may need more elaborate arrangements and costly hiring of special staff (cooks, musicians and artists) as well as the building of special structures in and outside of the temple. The deity may stay within the temple for special worship, or may be brought out on a wooden chariot into surrounding streets in a colourful procession for worshippers to see and to participate in. It is considered highly auspicious to help pull the ropes that move the wooden chariot on its processional way.

Commonly, the word *utsava* is used for festivals, which means an activity that removes misery, or obstacles, and in this way, it is believed that festivals bring benefits for all, both individually and on a universal scale. Huyler suggests also that the movement of the deity out of its darkened place in the temple to the thronged, sunlit streets 'symbolizes the opening of the heart and mind of each individual through participation in this annual celebration' (ibid:170). The dates of *utsavas* are determined astrologically and can be of three types: those that mark regular monthly rituals in the temples, for example, the new moon, or a special day in the month; annual observances of birthdays or marriages of the deities or special periods such as *Navratri* or *Divali*²¹; and festivals for special occasions or special purposes. These events act as 'temporal markers, by which the latent potentialities of the moment are actualized or controlled' (Merrey 1982:1).

The diverse nature of Hinduism is reflected in the huge variety of festival celebrations – some pan-Indian and some confined to particular localities. In the UK, most major festivals, such as *Divali* and *Navratri* are celebrated by all Hindu groups, whereas the annual summer festival, a month-long celebration which culminates in a spectacular outdoor procession of the main temple deity, and the worship of the deity Murugan at *Tai Pusam* is only practised by the Tamils. In their ethnographic research on Hindu children in Britain, Jackson and Nesbitt (1993) examined what factors would influence which Hindu festivals the children participated in. They discovered that it would

vary according to their parents' region of origin in the Indian subcontinent and the *sampradaya* or particular 'sectarian' tradition which most influences them. As this in some instances is closely linked to their caste (*jati*) it is also true to say that certain festivals or ways of celebrating them are caste-specific.

Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:78

Apart from the conspicuous enjoyment of festival time, there are significant reasons for the celebration of such events by an immigrant community. Festival participation in a country where Asians remain a strong but minority community is an obvious factor in strengthening group identity, but it too confirms identity with a particular *jati* or *sampradaya*²². Logan (1988:161) suggests that Hindu children learn about their religion 'through observing and participating in ritual' of particular festival activities, and that the children's involvement allows for an easy and natural process of socialisation into Hinduism. Similarly, Jackson and Nesbitt comment that the festivals for Hindus are:

annual opportunities for cultural affirmation... It is clearly apparent that in the adaptations to festivals made by Britain's Hindus, a major concern for parents is the cultural identity of their children.

Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:89

4.5:1 Navratri

Although *Navratri* is an annual pan-Indian festival, it is celebrated with particular enthusiasm and enjoyment by the Gujaratis. Gujarat, in north-west India, has a very rich cultural heritage, particularly in music and poetry which sees its expression in the instrumental and vocal music that accompanies the movement forms of the *Navratri* celebrations. *Navratri*, or *Norta* as it is called in Gujarati, falls at the end of the monsoon period, and heralds the end of the old year. The crescendo of this period is the festival of

Diwali, which falls two-three weeks after the end of *Navratri*, and when the New Year is welcomed in many parts of India, and particularly by the Gujaratis.

The dates of these festivals are calculated according to the Hindu lunar calendar,²³ with *Navratri* occurring each year in September or October of the western Gregorian calendar. The nine nights of *Navratri* follow the new moon in the month of *Asvin* (September/October), and are followed by a tenth night of celebration called *Dashera* (lit. 'tenth'). It is a time of honouring the female power of the divine, the *devi* or *shakti* power which is considered to be a positive force for good that can triumph over evil. This power is seen as having the potency to ward off demonic forces, of protecting goodness and nourishing the weak, and is worshipped in many different forms according to the different aspects shown. Gujaratis speak of praying at *Navratri* to *devi* as goddess Amba, depicted in a powerful image with six arms and riding a tiger, or of praying to Mataji (mother), Mahalakshmi (great Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity, and consort of God Vishnu), Mahakali (great Kali, the forceful form who can destroy evil) or Durga herself, the consort of God Siva. In Bengal and other parts of eastern India such as Orissa, the festival is called *Durga Puja*, as the worship is offered to *devi* in this form alone.

Gujarati children at Rushey Mead School in Leicester interviewed by the author spoke of *Navratri* with great excitement and affection. Of the eight teenagers responding (mixed sex), one had attended all ten nights of the festival (*Navratri* plus *Dashera*), another for eight, and the rest between five and seven nights. Most varied their places of attendance at *Navratri*, apart from one fourteen-year old girl who participated solely at her *samaj* (caste association) celebrations for five nights. One of the boys was Punjabi-speaking, but the rest of the group spoke Gujarati and all attended a temple regularly with their families. They had visited *Navratri* events with their families and their friends, and five of the group had travelled out of Leicester on other occasions to celebrate *Navratri* in London, Preston and Nottingham. Each teenager interviewed attended the festival celebrations every year, and they all stated that the most enjoyable aspect was playing *Raas* (the stick folk dance), as well as meeting their friends. All five girls confirmed that

playing *Garba* was one of the best features of the evening, and two agreed that the religious aspect was most important. All the young people knew the spiritual significance of the event and spoke of enjoying the *arati*²⁴ in the middle of the evening. All five girls also said they practised dance at home, as did one of the boys, and half of the group indicated that the music at *Navratri* was one of the best features of the event. They described that the playing of *Garba* ‘relaxes you and concentrates you for the *arati*’, but added that the social aspect of the evening seemed more important nowadays. Their enjoyment and enthusiasm for the festival was marked. (See Appendix 4 for charts showing the results of interviews with Rushey Mead schoolchildren discussing *Navratri*).

The pleasure and delight of the *Navratri* evenings in the company of families and friends, the beat of the music and the happy, convivial atmosphere is noted too in Jackson and Nesbitt’s research on Hindu children in Britain (1993). *Norta* is a time for dressing up in new outfits (sometimes a different one each night), to exhibit dancing skills, and to be out late each evening. One girl in their research summed up her experience, ‘*Navratri* means enjoying yourself, meeting friends, getting hot, staying up late and it’s just fun’ (ibid:88). In Logan’s work on British Hindu children’s religious experiences, a nine-year old spoke in a similar way:

We dance, we sing songs, we do really fast *garabas* and give *prasada* and do *arati*. It’s really good fun. We do it in a hall. It’s at night.

Logan 1988:166

Avtar Brah’s examination of identity in diaspora notes how cultural expression is ‘crucial in affirming or contesting’ (1996:47) identity, and describes the *Navratri* dance practices as

an arena for the play of gender and caste-inflected Hindu-Gujarati identities. Caste inequalities may be reinforced, since *Navratri* congregations meet under the aegis of various caste-based organisations, but these same organisations could well be used by the lower castes as a ground from which to contest these very hierarchies.

Brah 1996:47

In August 2003 at the Edinburgh International Festival, the Tamasha Theatre Company (whose aims are to reveal the hidden stories within UK Asian culture) showcased a production called *Strictly Dandia*. This light-hearted exploration of the transition from

tradition to post-modernity in contemporary Asian life took the setting of the *Navratri* festival to show young Gujaratis competing in an inter-caste dance competition, under the watchful and controlling eyes of their parents and older family members. The play reveals that all is not as it seems on the surface: the young women dancing in a 'rotating display of Hindu femininity' (Khan 2004:n.p.) are being exhibited for marriage; the open welcome to all newcomers hides 'a steely resolve to keep things controlled and absolute; security at the door...makes sure not too many "slims" – Muslims – get in to eye the girls' (ibid). Finally, the male of the leading dance couple who has fallen in love with his Hindu dance partner is exposed as a Muslim. One of the elders then says: 'Yes. Integration is all very well but it has its place. This sort of dilution leads to pollution.' (Bhuchar and Landon-Smith 2004:52). The *Navratri* dance forms, both literally and metaphorically, are used to indicate the tensions of power, tradition, caste control, acceptance, challenge of the status quo and the struggles of an immigrant community to succeed.

4.5:2 Playing Garba and Raas at Navratri

Visits to two of the major evenings of the *Navratri* festival in Leicester in November 2002, both organised by the Leicester Hindu Festival Council,²⁵ revealed different aspects of the event than experienced the year before in London. These were enormous gatherings at two of the largest halls in Leicester – one at De Montfort Hall, a prominent arts venue with a seating capacity of 2,200 (for these occasions 1,800 is the maximum), and the second in the Ramgarhia Community Centre, a community hall rented for this occasion from the Sikhs (also with a capacity of 1,800)²⁶. Both events are ticketed, and at weekends are quickly sold out so tickets must be purchased in advance. For the mid-week events I attended, tickets could be bought at the door, although we had advance tickets. Despite Leicester City Council's promotion of *Navratri* as a tourist attraction, advance information about the event is scarce. Ringing the City Council, I was told I could get details from the tourist office, who, also unable to help, then advised me to ring the City Council. BBC Leicester informed me that details would be posted on their website, but that did not happen. I finally discovered that the Hindu Festival Council had

sent details to the Communications Unit at the main Council, but it arrived too late for them to use it in print, and it was thrown away.

The Hindu Festival Council agreed to send me two posters of the events at De Montfort Hall, and Ramgarhia Hall with details of tickets. Tickets can be bought for each evening from the organisers (£3.00 and £2.50 respectively), or a 'season' ticket is available.

When the leaflets arrived, I rang to purchase tickets, only to be told that you have to buy them in person, or just turn up on the night when places could not be guaranteed. I explained I was in London and it was suggested that I must have family or friends who could go to the association in Leicester to buy tickets. The strong impression created is that these events are for the Gujarati community, and there is no real concern or desire for 'outsiders' to attend. Finally, I was given tickets by two of the dance teachers with whom I attended the evenings.

The nine evenings at De Montfort Hall attract very large numbers of teenagers and young people, and although families also attend, many of the youth are there on their own. The girls vie with each other in sporting the latest Indian fashions, wearing *choli* blouses and various *salwar* tops that have elegant, thin straps or even that are strapless. Their make-up and hair are immaculate, and the place is buzzing with energy. Some respondents interviewed commented rather disparagingly about *Navratri* at De Montfort Hall, saying that it was well-known as 'a pick-up joint', and one twenty-two year old girl told me she would never go there, adding that 'They're all so snooty, looking at what everyone is wearing and making comments' (author's fieldnotes 10.10.02). The young men are mainly in western clothes, with a few wearing Indian *kurtas*, and with stylishly gelled hair. As previous years have seen some trouble with Asian gangs, there was a tight security presence on the door with bouncers employed and tickets carefully checked. The event was scheduled to begin at 7.30pm, and when we arrived at 8.30, there were many teenagers walking around outside the main auditorium, the boys with their *dandiyas* (sticks), teasing and joking with groups of girls. Inside, the hall space was packed with hundreds of women, girls and some men, playing *Garba*. It was an impressive sight. The live music, played by musicians brought over from Gujarat for

Navratri, and loudly amplified, filled the hall with the fast beat and the devotional songs. I accompanied Leicester dancer Nilima Devi, and on arrival, we were keen to join in, but we had brought with us her elderly mother and aunt, here in the UK on an extended stay from India. By the time we managed to get them into seats on the balcony, the music had stopped and there followed twenty minutes of speeches and presentations of bouquets before prayers. Apparently it was a VIP evening, so the first half had finished early for this. Nearly an hour passed before the *Raas* stick dances began, causing some disappointment, as we had wanted to participate, and I had hoped also to film part of the *Garba*.

Figure 10. *Navratri* evening at De Montfort Hall, Leicester, October 2003.

But we were able to join the *Raas* stick folk dance (often simply called *Dandia*) after the prayers at about 9.20pm, and did so quickly as the dance floor was rapidly filling with groups. With a partner one joins a double line of people, facing each other and with usually about 20-30 in a group (it must be an even number). The lines move clockwise, and each person steps forward to hit sticks with their partner, then moves on two people.

At the end of the line, each turns and joins the line opposite, so the movement is continuous. The music starts very slowly, taking up to an hour to work up to a faster beat, but the basic steps remain the same, and simply repeat. It is an eight-beat time cycle called *Kaherva* and performed in the following manner: on the first beat your own sticks are hit together, followed by right sticks with your partner, then left sticks (or the same stick if using one). Each one then turns away to the left to hit their own sticks together before turning back to the partner to hit right sticks again, and before moving on two places to a new partner. The repetitive form and the space in the rhythm allow opportunity for creative interpretation and there were many variants on this occasion. People turned on the spot before hitting sticks, some jumped in and out with both feet together rather than stepping in and out, others were changing places mid-step, and some were even hitting their sticks in a rhythm on the ground, in a manner akin to some English Morris dances. It was all beautifully executed with ease and in perfect timing with the beat. As the pace of the beat increased, some of the groups of men were creating very fast and lively movements with the basic rhythm using high jumps and wild turns. Their choreography was spontaneous, expressive and full of energy, yet at one with the group and the rhythm. They hit the sticks with increasing force, as if in a display of masculine virility. [See accompanying DVD Track 1 for film extracts of *Raas* recorded at De Montfort Hall and the Ramgarhia Hall].

As we danced, Devi started to add extra turns to the basic steps which I attempted to follow. The music gathered momentum and it was necessary to concentrate on hitting the sticks of the partner facing you, as it was easy to miss-hit at speed (which the other dancers do not appreciate). Some were moving with only one stick, and some used both sticks in one hand; most of the sticks were highly coloured – either painted, or with bright fabric firmly covering them. As Jackson and Nesbitt note, ‘The footwork and stickwork provide scope for considerable panache’ (1993:88). The music was continuous, so people joined in all the time, whilst others were leaving. All ages participated (apart from the very elderly), including large numbers of men, and the dance floor was now hot and very crowded. The three Gujarati musicians played keyboards and drums and were joined by three singers. This *Raas* folk dance is said to be associated with stories of

Krishna and the cowgirls (*gopis*), showing the circle of girls dancing around Krishna as told in the mythology, and so the songs sung relate to Krishna and his exploits.

Figure 11. Men playing *Ranjaniyu* at De Montfort Hall, Leicester, October 2003.

The next night we met at 8.30pm at the Ramgarhia Hall, joining dancer and teacher Smita Vadnerka and her group of dancers. Already the hall was full, and both men and women were playing *Garba*. It began with the traditional three-clap step, performed in a eight-beat time cycle (*Kaherva*, as for the *Raas* steps) and travelling anti-clockwise in huge concentric circles around the temporary central shrine. Again, like the *Raas*, the music began slowly at the outset and the movements were walked, but as the tempi increased, the dancers' steps moved in a more flowing manner and gradually increased in speed. The sequence of the simple three-clap *Garba* is as follows: one step to the right on the right foot (but with the body turning to the left), then the left foot steps behind the right, followed by one more step on the right and another on the left foot, and the whole

sequence travels to the right. The hand claps are executed on the first three beats; clapping towards the left and down for the first two, and then to the right and higher for the third. Gradually more variants creep in and as the speed increases, the basic pattern changes to a step-ball-change on each foot, travelling and turning in rhythmic and patterned formations, with two claps in the sequence. Some groups were even moving as one whole, first several feet to the right, then back to the left, before turning again to continue anti-clockwise in a slow progression around the hall. The three-clap and two clap forms of *Garba* are called in Gujarati, *Be talin no Garbo ane trana no Garbo*, and the style of clapping and performing half and full-turns is called *Heench*. Often at the end of the evening, a fast movement called *Ranjaniyu* is played, where three or four participants may hold hands and move together in a spontaneous response to the climax of the music, or dance solo. This is a free-style dance form using different formations and combinations of movements, and can be quite wild. [See accompanying DVD Track 2 for film extracts of *Garba* at the Ramgarhia Hall and in London].

As we continued, Vadnerka led the group and soon we moved at great speed, finding spaces in the already congested dance floor and following her creative choreography. Although it was extremely warm and there was little space, everyone was enjoying themselves. We danced the *Dodhiu*, a *Garba* variation without claps where the arm swings in opposition to the opposite leg, and the feet create fast-moving floor patterns. A party-like atmosphere was created by the stylish clothes, the laughter and joking, coupled with the high energy of the event. Again, there were some men participating, although traditionally this is a women's dance.

Apart from the large events at the hired halls, *Navratri* celebrations take place in most of the Hindu temples in Leicester, as also in smaller hired venues by local *samaj* groups. Each night for the nine evenings there will be *Raas* and *Garba* with prayers and *arati* during the evening. The events at the temples attract the older people, and although crowded, are quieter and more devout because of the setting. At the Sri Hindu Mandir in Leicester at *Navratri* during 2003, many of the older men participated both in the *Garba* and the *Raas*. The musicians, rather than being brought in from India (as in the larger

events) were local people, some even devotees of that temple. This particular temple has enough space to utilise the actual temple for the *Garba*; in other *mandirs* (temples), the adjoining community hall will be used. Afternoon *Garba* occasions are also organised here and in other temples, when the older women can attend to play *Garba* without concern of overcrowding, or of being out late at night or in the dark. No musicians are booked as the women sing for themselves whilst participating.

I include here too observations from the *Navratri* events at the main *Swaminarayan* Temple in London, as it has dedicated links with the Gujarati community in Leicester, and follows a Vaishnavite form of worship. On these festival occasions, several coachloads of young people from Leicester will make the two-hour motorway journey to celebrate at the London temple, particularly on Saturday evenings. The central shrine at *Navratri* is a 2-dimensional life-size photographic image of their leader, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, rather than a shrine dedicated to *Devi*, around which the women and children play *Garba* and to whom the *arati* and prayers are offered mid-way through the evening. It is strictly segregated, only attended by the women and children, and only female musicians and singers providing the music. On the nights I visited, the children began the proceedings, led by two women who had been giving the girls prior practice to get them all in rhythm together. A good deal of time and care had been invested in these young people, including their beautiful traditional outfits which they wore with great pride. All these factors indicate the importance of the transmission of the *Garba* and *Raas* ‘dances’ – important because it is the dissemination of Gujarati and Hindu culture, and in this case, of the particular *sampradaya* of *Swaminarayan*. The young boys will also perform Gujarati folk dances for special occasions, such as the arrival of the chief guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj or at *Divali*.

Segregation of the sexes plays a significant part in temple life within this Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar- Purushottam branch of the *Swaminarayan* movement, as Williams describes:

Rules that enforce separation of the sexes have the manifest function of protecting both men and women from sensual temptation, but leaders explain that the more important latent function is to protect women from exploitation

by men...The argument is advanced that the discipline for the householder makes him a good husband and father and results in improved economic and social security for the women members of the family.

Williams 1984:144

Many of the women I spoke to attending the *Navratri* practices at the London *Swaminarayan Mandir* indicated how they preferred the women-only evenings; they described a quieter, more concentrated, more devotional atmosphere than experienced at other mixed events. 'Other organisations seem to lose the sense of why you do it, and it gets so crowded when the men and boys are there' lamented one female informant. When I discussed with them the lively, noisy and crowded mixed-gender *Navratri* celebrations in Leicester that I had participated in, these women were somewhat disapproving and censorious in their comments, implying that the Leicester practices were 'lower-class' and not as refined or religious as at the *Swaminarayan* temple (author's fieldnotes 12.10.02).

The preference for women-only occasions, however, does not suit all tastes. One London-based Bharatanatyam dancer interviewed voiced a contradictory opinion:

I have danced at the *Swaminarayan* temple in the hall, not the shrine.
I am not very keen on the *Swaminarayan* sect as their swamis are not supposed to look at women – fine for them but it means that the women always sit at the back or off to the side and that they cannot meet the swamis...
Anyway, I danced for the women on one occasion – in itself a rewarding experience – I don't think they had much exposure to classical art.

Personal communication 27.11.01

Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:46) also discovered that some followers of Sathya Sai Baba²⁷ do not allow men to join in their celebrations of *Navratri*.

4.5:3 Religious and ethnic identity at Navratri

After the *Garba* follows the *arati*, the religious prayers and the climax of the evening. Everyone gathers around the central shrine, called a *garabi*, mounted on a table and polygonal in shape. It is brightly coloured, and has small 'fairy' lights decorating it. There are different visual images of the goddess on each side, and a sculptural image on the top.

Arati is the key part of *puja*, and may stand for the whole, as it does here, and is

so often the case with Hindu ritual. It involves the circling of a light, or lights, around or before the representation of the deities. This is accompanied by singing in the Gujarati tradition. People then place their hands over the light's flame, touch their eyes and/or the top of their head and put some money on the special *arati* plate. People may bring their own *arati* plates to *garabas*, putting them under the shrine with the other offerings to the Goddess.

Logan 1988:163

Figure 12. *Garabi* – the central shrine at *Navratri*.

Everyone participates in the singing of devotional songs during the *arati*, clapping to the rhythm if they are not holding trays. These are songs that invoke the goddess in all her

different aspects. On two occasions, during this powerful time of the evening, I have witnessed women going into a trance and my informants have explained this is an indication of the power and purity of the event. Issues relating to temporary possession, trance dance and the important distinction for Hindus between the pure and impure are discussed in a later chapter.

One of the younger ladies of Vadnerka's group told me that the religious aspect of the event is the most important for her. Although she loves the dance movement, she does not just attend for that. Another married woman of the group explained that she fasted for religious reasons during all nine days of the festival by eating only one meal a day. Many of the people attending will also be worshipping *Navratri* at their domestic shrines, although practices will vary greatly. One Gujarati woman from Nairobi who had lived in Nottingham for twenty-five years, when interviewed on Radio 3 about her attendance at *Navratri* said:

I come only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights as we cannot do the late nights with the children, and we have to go to work also. We do have a shrine at home and we worship there for the nine days as well.
Ashid Acharya, in Duran 2001 (BBC Radio 3:27.10.01)

When I asked my Gujarati informants if playing *Garba* and *Raas* was a confirmation of their Gujarati identity, they all agreed, stating that although *Navratri* is celebrated as a pan-Indian festival, the dances of *Garba* and *Raas* are known to be particular to the Gujaratis, and recognised to be part of their religious and cultural heritage by other Indians. Participating in *Navratri* constructs a Hindu identity, but this distinct way of celebrating confirms a Gujarati Hindu identity.

4.5:4 Mahasivaratri, Ratha Yatra, Divali

Dance practices are also associated in Leicester with other major Hindu religious festivals such as *Mahasivaratri*, *Ratha Yatra* and *Divali*. *Mahasivaratri*, dedicated to the deity Siva is celebrated during the Hindu lunar month of *Phalgun*. Each year the Leicester *Hindu Religion Study Group* organises a major event for this festival, hiring a large hall (often the Rushey Mead School main hall) and hosting a long afternoon and evening of *puja* (with a priest), dance performances and food. Two to three hundred people will

regularly attend, and the Leicester dancers and dance teachers are asked to give their services free. In March 2002, special guests at this event included the Mayor of Leicester, and some of the programme was filmed for the local GM TV. The two-hour dance presentation on the stage incorporated folk dances by children from the local primary school, a dedication to Siva in classical Kathak by professional dancer Nilima Devi, some 'creative' items by students of Smita Vadnerka and some classical Bharatanatyam and 'creative' items by teacher Vaidehi Pancholi and her eight-year old daughter.

Pancholi, when interviewed about this performance later, spoke of how she dances only at religious occasions such as this. In the past she has presented purely classical Bharatanatyam items, but says now the audience gets bored so has choreographed new pieces based on classical repertoire but using more modern *bhajans*. Her term for this is 'creative dance'. 'Dance is the way I express my faith' she told me (author's fieldnotes 12.7.02), and although she does not attend a particular temple regularly, she is a life-long member of the *Hindu Religion Study Group*, and will occasionally visit various Leicester temples.

In 2003, the Ratha Yatra festival run by the Leicester ISKCON group featured dance performances as part of their devotional programme. Held in marquees in Cossington Park, the 'Festival of Chariots' is the culmination of the parade of the Krishna and Radha deities on a wooden chariot, pulled through the main streets of Leicester²⁸. On a small and narrow stage in the main marquee, Vadnerka's dance students presented items of Krishna and Radha stories in a creative style based on classical Bharatanatyam, with additional folk and filmi dance movements. They were followed by two young ISKCON devotees from London, aged nine and twelve, who gave a somewhat under-rehearsed performance of classical Bharatanatyam dances, and finally, by Nayana Whittaker and her students from Leicester who performed Gujarati folk dances. The dancing was warmly appreciated by the large audience filling the tent, many of whom congratulated the teachers and the girls on their performances afterwards. All the performers gave their services free.

A similar arrangement takes place for the festival of *Divali*, in October or November of each year. There are open-air celebrations in the Asian area of Belgrave Road, where up to 20,000 Hindus gather (or as some reports state, 60,000; see Martin and Singh 2002:12), many of whom have travelled from other major cities in the UK, as Leicester's *Divali* festivities are the largest outside of India. Dance performance is included as part of the staged cultural display, when again, the dance teachers are asked by the Hindu Festival Council (organisers of the event in conjunction with Leicester City Council)²⁹ if their groups will perform as a service. They will mostly show items with a religious theme danced to religious songs and using both classical and creative dance styles.

It is evident from this ethnographic fieldwork in Leicester that varied forms of South Asian dance are an integral part of Hindu festival celebrations, in a participatory aspect such as at *Navratri*, and as staged performances at other major festivals such as *Divali*, *Mahasivaratri* and *Ratha Yatra*. Fieldwork has also revealed dance practice and performance within the temples, but this takes place primarily in the adjoining community hall, not in the ritual space where the deities reside. Perhaps this modern phenomenon echoes the ancient tradition of a separate dance hall (*nritya mandapa*) within the original temple complexes? (See Chapter Six for further discussion).

One example of the above is the Sri Sanatan Temple in Leicester. Here, dance practices are part of the Sunday School for children, and occur irregularly, for special events, such as the annual *Raas/Garba* competition in De Montfort Hall, Leicester, for a special temple festival in November, and for a performance for parents at Christmas. All these practices take place in the large hall above the temple which has a reasonably-sized stage. In 2004, the temple purchased an unused mosque on the opposite side of the road and has plans to develop a youth cultural centre there. The extra space may give the opportunity to offer more regular dance classes for the young people of the community.

4.6 Asian dance practices in Leicester: the beginning

As early as 1964 and 1965, dance performances were included in cultural programmes organised by the Asian community for India's Independence Day in Leicester.

Informants interviewed by the Living History Unit at Leicester City Council in 1996, spoke of their memories of those early days:

When I came here in 1964... there were some organisations who were involved in setting up the local groups to organise cultural and religious events in the city. I can remember ... the first cultural programme I have seen in Leicester was the Indian Independence Day. That was organised by India Link in 1964, and also in 1965...The cultural programme consisted of classical music and also Indian folk dances and Raas.

Informant cited in Hyde 1996:7

As early as 1965, *Navratri* festivities were being set up on a small scale, and included the folk dances of *Raas* and *Garba*. When the Gujarat Hindu Association, an umbrella organisation incorporating the different *jati* groups and communities was formed in 1970, the children were taught folk dances. By 1972, the first *Raas/Garba* competition³⁰ between dance groups was established, and this popular activity has run for many years and still continues as a well-attended event at De Montfort Hall. The groups choreograph their own steps, make their own costumes and there is fierce competition to win. One Asian woman who had left Uganda in 1972, spoke of her initial experience in Leicester of *Navratri*:

When I came in October the Navratri festival had just started and I happened to go to Granby Halls and to my amazement it was packed out with lots of Asian people from all over the country in fact, because it was supposed to be one of the biggest held Navratri events...The music was live and everybody was playing traditional Raas and Garba. The new thing I saw at that time was that the Raas and Garba was played by mixed gender, where back home in Uganda, and what I've heard in India, that people did not play together...men used to play separate from the female. The different thing here was that everyone played together.

Informant cited in Hyde 1996:12-13

It is worth noting in these comments that the mixed gender engagement in these *Navratri* movement practices was questioned by this female informant. Three of my visits to *Navratri* celebrations have revealed 'segregated' practices: the first was at an evening where men and women were present, but only the women and girls performed *Garba*, and some of the men and boys joined in with the women for the later *Raas* stick dances. At another event, the men watched from a balcony above the dance area, but did not participate.

Figure 13. Women playing *Garba* at *Navratri*, London, October 2001

Figure 14. Men and women playing *Raas* at *Navratri*, London, October 2001.

At both these *Navratri* evenings, the men (husbands, brothers and sons) organised the tickets, manned the door, and served the food and so were very much in evidence. One of my informants was a male who was part of the organising committee of one of these events.³¹ He described the men's roles being that of organising and of providing security, as they were not happy with the women being out late at night alone. He added his view that in England, the men did not join in with the women in the folk dances.

Returning to the development of dance practices in Leicester, although the folk dances of *Raas* and *Garba* were well established by the late 1970s, as Leicester City's Arts Advisory Office, Peter Bryan described:

to people outside of the Asian communities, and also for many Asians, Indian dance forms were largely focussed on community dancing, celebrating festivals, gatherings and family events. All classical dance forms had a very low profile at this stage.

Bryan 1996:2

A significant turning point occurred in 1980 with the arrival of Nilima Devi from India (via Germany), who had taken undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in music and Kathak dance at Baroda University. By 1981 she had opened the Centre for Indian Classical Dance in Leicester (CICD) and offered a six-year diploma training in Kathak modelled on an Indian syllabus. She was soon being approached to hold workshops and demonstrations in schools. This escalated and by 1985, the UK's first Asian Dance Animation project was set up through a collaboration between Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, East Midlands Council and the Arts Council, with Devi becoming the first classical dance animateur for the region. Piali Ray (now director of Sampad, the developmental agency for South Asian arts in Birmingham) was also appointed animateur specialising in Asian contemporary and folk dance forms. In 1991, a trainee animateur scheme was successfully established, and ten advanced Kathak students in teaching skills for the community were trained: 'some of them now play an important part in dance development work elsewhere in Britain' (Devi 1996a:7).

The teaching of South Asian music in Leicester too began to encompass a more structured form in the early 1980s, supported by two major initiatives. The first of these

occurred after Asian councillor Paul Sood took a council delegation (including the director of Education) to India to establish music and cultural contacts. They returned with Delhi-based Dr Debu Choudhary who was to teach sitar in Leicester, and to begin to train other musicians to tutor in schools. Sood purchased instruments from India for use in the Leicester schools, and established a strong connection with the then Leicester College of Music. At the same time, in 1983, an organisation was started called Leicester Music Circle, with the aim of promoting classical Asian music in the local community. They provided substantial support for Sood and his initiatives, and ran a series of workshops and concerts at the College of Music at that time. This non-profit making organisation soon became renamed as Shruti Arts and included under its auspices classical dance as well as music. At one point it had over 1,500 members, received support from the Arts Council, and was promoting concerts by some of the most prominent musicians on the Asian circuit. Shruti Arts were also pioneers in bringing over top-quality Gujarati musicians for the *Navratri* festival in Leicester. Now the group has around 400 members and has become part of a consortium that includes the Asian Music Circle, Milupfest, based in Liverpool, and the Leicester International Music Festival (author's fieldnotes 14.5.03).

Interest in Asian music and dance was also developing in the West Midlands as the Asian community in towns such as Coventry and Birmingham began promoting and running dance competitions in the early 1980s. The arts policy reviews of West Midlands Arts in 1980 and 1982 led to a commissioned report on Asian Dance (Gahir 1984) which concluded that although 'there is tremendous talent in the region' and 'that the West Midlands is a very healthy breeding ground for Asian dance' (ibid:6), there was little financial support, or structured training and education. The report recommended establishing in-service courses for teachers; assistance for dancers in other skills necessary for performances, such as lighting and technical support, wardrobe and administration; specific programmes of training in dance and choreography, and the setting up of an Ethnic Dance Working Party. Gahir noted too that:

Dance, however, still plays an important part in religious celebrations and festivities...The Hindu Gujarati [sic] community is perhaps most liberal in its outlook on dance because dance groups are often organised through temples.

In fact, the festival of Navratri is celebrated by Gujaratis [sic] and throughout the region schools and community centre are hired for nine days, for dance and singing as part of prayer.

Gahir 1984:16

The 1990s saw further expansion of the teaching of South Asian dance in Leicester when Leicester City Council created a position of Asian Dance Development Officer in 1991. Devi was employed in this post on a permanent basis, as well as acting as Asian Dance Advisory Teacher for Leicestershire Arts in Education. During this period, a major new and successful training project in Kathak for talented school children from the age of eight was established, and this led to a series of high quality showcase performances by these young dancers. Bryan wrote at the time:

South Asian dance is now firmly established in the main programme of the regional venues such as the Phoenix and Haymarket Theatres. Sell-out concerts in a range of different South Asian dance styles have become common-place, and the shows are now catering for more mixed audiences. South Asian dance has become a recognised dance form for local audiences and we think that much of this popularity can be attributed to the consistent development of Asian dance in Leicester.

Bryan 1996:3

1993 saw the setting up in Leicester of SAMPA – the Shaswat Academy of Music and Performing Arts – by Kumar Shaswat, a professional Kathak dancer and musician from Allahabad, India. Over ten years on it is still thriving, with new branches established in Rugby, Bradford and Coventry, and in 2003 was training over 200 students. Shaswat had always wanted the school to be independent and self-sufficient, so did not apply for or receive any form of funding. He remains the key teacher, supported by his senior students who will teach after 8-10 years of training, and nine subjects are offered in the school, including Kathak, *tabla*, harmonium, *sitar* and *pakhawaj* (north Indian drum). There is a system of internal assessment and examination, but no external examinations are taken.

Then in 1995, *ADiTi News* (a South Asian dance journal) dedicated one complete issue to South Asian dance in Leicester, and in 1996, the Council's Living History Unit published *Parampara –continuing the tradition*, a booklet outlining the story of thirty years of Asian dance and music in Leicester, compiled through oral history interviews.

Such was the apparent interest in South Asian dance forms at that time that Leicester Polytechnic (now De Montfort University), decided to offer a new BA Combined (Hons.) in South Asian Dance in 1992.³² The degree course was the first of its kind, and grew out of detailed and lengthy consultation work between East Midlands Arts, ADiTi, and Michael Huxley, Head of Dance at Leicester Polytechnic. Huxley and Naseem Khan wrote the syllabus, which also offered modules in arts management, contemporary Asian studies and performing arts. A funded post for a practitioner/lecturer was provided by the Performing Arts department, but no suitable applicant could be found and student applications for the course were extremely low. An attempt was made then to bring in part-time lecturers. Despite a well-marketed promotion drive, only four students enrolled, and two left before the new term started. The course struggled to survive for a year and finally the students were advised to complete their degrees by taking the contemporary dance options. Preeti Raithatha, one of the two dancers on the course, and the first woman to have passed 'A' level South Asian dance before the degree, completed her three years by undertaking some project-based work in London with Shobana Jeyasingh and Akademi, alongside the contemporary dance modules (David 2003:7).

Questions have been raised in reports published in 1997 by Grau, and Iyer, and by Stacey Prickett (2003b) with regard to the failure of this and other university-based initiatives into South Asian dance. Concern about issues such as tokenism, ways of assessment, choice of styles of dance forms and choreographers were raised, as Prickett points out:

The assimilation of dance into higher education as an art form is faced with a tension between its subjective, interpretive elements and pedagogic scrutiny. Where this has been negotiated in styles of contemporary dance and ballet, new concerns arise with the inclusion of non-western dance forms. Thus, for example, assessment, whether for exam or for performance review, is a tricky area where you can be damned if you do, and damned if you don't: if you use 'western' criteria, you miss the point; if you use 'specialist' criteria, you are making it an 'other'.

Prickett 2003b: 9-10

So the questions remain as to whether Leicester Polytechnic was simply ahead of its time, or was trying to impose an educational structure that fell short of the students' needs, or whether this was not ultimately what the South Asian dance community wanted. In fact, Devi had two Kathak students who, in 1994, won ADiTi scholarships to train full-time in

India for one year. Perhaps for the select few who wished to take up full-time training, the traditional *guru-shishya* system in India was more enticing and rewarding, providing an 'authenticity' as well as a fully fledged system of training.

4.7 Contemporary views

There continues to be a strong presence of Asian dance in taught classes and in performance in Leicester. Apart from the two previously mentioned schools and their teachers (Nilima Devi and Kumar Shaswat, both classically trained in Kathak), there are six or seven other professional teachers/performers teaching privately. Questionnaires and interviews with these dance teachers and performers have revealed a wide range of approaches and backgrounds to the teaching and performance of South Asian dance, and exposed some of the frustrations of teaching in a city such as Leicester and within the Asian community there. Information from these interviews reveals the amount of teaching and performing each teacher and their students are undertaking; this encompasses local community festivals and events to staged performances at Leicester's theatres, through to national tours and work with other Asian arts organisations in Bradford, Birmingham and Manchester. The charts in Appendix 4 (A.1, 2, and 3) show whether or not an examination system is used in teaching; what training the teacher or performer has and what type of dance is taught; what terminology is used to describe the styles taught, and whether or not funding is received. All respondents viewed religion as being an integral part of dance practice, and all believed that to some degree, the learning and practice of dance confirms Asian cultural identity. Issues such as caste distinction did not feature, and neither did considerations of menstruation (as a bar to performing). Some teachers and their groups had performed within temples in Leicester for religious functions (see later chapters for further discussion of these topics).

The dominant frustrations experienced by Leicester's South Asian dance teachers were related to the lack of interest in classical dance forms from the Leicester Asian community, and the absence of commitment from the students. Most of the teachers spoke of how the young people wanted to learn dance quickly in order to be able to perform and how few wished to train to more advanced levels or make a commitment to

dance professionally. Lack of space and lack of available funding were also cited as being problematic. Three of the teachers admitted to having to change their style and technique of teaching to accommodate the widespread desire amongst the girls to learn filmi dance rather than a classical dance form; others encompassed these changes in different ways – by teaching only classical with no compromise, or by offering a wide range of styles including folk and creative dance (see Chapter Seven).

Vaidehi Pancholi, one of the teachers interviewed, trained in the classical style of Bharatanatyam and who has taught in Leicester for ten years, spoke of girls coming to her for lessons aged 5-6 years, and who then give up dancing when they are older. Their parents want them to partake of the culture, but pressure is put on as exams loom and dance classes are dropped. This is a tension common in the diasporic environment where simultaneous desires operate – one for the children to absorb their cultural heritage and the simultaneous and understandably powerful aspirations for the children to succeed academically (the ‘DEAL’ syndrome, as one respondent put it to me – becoming Doctors, Engineers, Accountants and Lawyers). In the ten years of teaching, not one of Pancholi’s pupils has taken up dancing seriously, or even taken an *arangetram*. Her dance group was often asked to perform at weddings, discos, music clubs and parties, but she did not support this in an attempt to maintain standards of performance and integrity of the style. In her own performances for religious occasions, she found the audience becomes bored with purely classical dance technique, and so has decided to provide more creative dance interpretations in her own performances. Evelyn Nodwell, writing on her own work with the Indian community in Vancouver, described too that:

Classical dance is not thought to be appreciated by enough people, and is not considered to be visually exciting enough for a mass show. A commonly expressed opinion is that “people get bored with classical”. This has an influence on the choices which the teachers of the classical dance schools must make if they wish their students to have the performance opportunities offered them.

Nodwell 1996:24

The Leicester dance teachers also indicated that concerns about how the dance is or is not appreciated influenced how and what they now teach.

Pancholi and several of the other teachers talked of financial difficulties relating to dance performance. For the performances at religious occasions, there was usually no payment; there may be expenses offered if there has been a need to travel. The only income related to dance was from the weekly lessons given to the children, and the charge for these was not high. Lessons at the local community centre cost £2.00 per student for each class, and at the Sanatan Community Project, the lessons were only £1.00. Another teacher was employed by the Jain Temple to prepare dances and train performers for a major festival and for this there was a small budget to pay her for her work. She had also been expected to stage a production of the *Ramayana* with forty children in one of the Hindu temples, for which no payment was offered. She said:

Dance is not really valued properly, as nowadays, everyone sees dance on the videos, and thinks anyone can do it. Dance is not seen as a professional area, so no money is allocated to pay the teachers.

Author's fieldnotes 18.2.2002

Gujarati respondents in Vancouver gave similar responses in Nodwell's research (1996).

One twenty-year old interviewed stated:

We base our steps on the movies. We never took lessons. In our community, there's always the Diwali Show every year. So we all just get together, pick a song and make up dances.

Respondent, cited in Nodwell 1996:23

Nilima Devi, in her teaching and performing of the classical form of Kathak too was concerned about a lack of funding. Her view was that without proper financial support, the dance form cannot be developed creatively or supported as a classical technique, and although initiatives have been shown by East Midlands Arts, they have been on a relatively small scale. Fortunately, the Lottery's Regional Arts programme announced an award of £90,000 for Devi's centre, the CICD, in 2004, which has been used in developing more South Asian dance programmes across the East Midlands using young dancers from the CICD, and has paid for a part-time administrator and office equipment. It has also supported Devi in creating new cross-cultural work using Kathak dance and traditional Irish step dance that was toured in the UK. Additionally, the grant supported the setting up of the first combined festival of dance and academic conference on South

Asian dance which was held in Leicester in September 2005 and was supported and arranged by the CICD.

The majority of the South Asian dance teachers in Leicester teach classes on a regular basis in community centres and school halls. A few give lessons privately in their homes, or in Devi's case, in her own dance studio. One teacher, in 2004 gave up class teaching in order to develop her own performing and teaching skills further as she felt she had become somewhat stale. Six out of the nine main teachers continue to perform, both in solo items and with their groups of young people, and the performances range from large productions in Leicester's two theatres to community events, and religious festivals such as *Navratri*, *Divali*, and *Mahasivaratri*. Examples of mainstream, yet creative productions of South Asian dance at the Haymarket Theatre include *Nupur Arts'* production of *Rhythm* in April 2003, choreographed and directed by teacher/dancer Smita Vadnerka. The press release stated:

Rhythm: A vibrance of rhythm to erupt your senses and exhilarate [sic] your heart. This dance piece incorporates [sic] powerful and dazzling steps based on folk, creative and contemporary styles. Rhythm takes you on a journey through past memories to the present with hit Bollywood film songs from the 1940's to today.
Nupur Arts, April 2003

In the same month, *Nritya Kala*, directed by Nayana Whittaker, presented *holi ayee re* (Holi is here) at the Haymarket, described as, 'A colourful and vibrant collection of South Asian creative, folk and semi-classical dance reflecting the Indian festival of Holi'. The financial agreement with the theatre was a fifty-fifty box office split of the total proceeds; this provided Whittaker a total of £360. Considering her costs for costumes, music, hire of rehearsal space, her own time and her (non-professional) dancers' time, this was hardly a substantial payment.

Several of the main Hindu annual events featuring dance performance in Leicester were sponsored by Sony Entertainment Television Asia³³, including the two-day summer *mela*, the large *Navratri* celebrations at De Montfort Hall and the *Raas/Garba* dance competition at the same location. Not only are these particular celebrations of Hinduism financed by Sony, they are also filmed and broadcast to the millions of Hindus in the diaspora and in India. These local, Gujarati-dominated events benefit substantially from

the considerable financial support from a multi-national, globalised corporation (they probably would not survive without such sponsorship), and in turn, are transformed from a local, traditional, cultural expression into a globalised commodity that confirms and reinforces Gujarati identity to diaspora groups worldwide. Rather than eroding the local cultural traditions, this example in Leicester demonstrates how the intersection of the global and local may be a productive and protective exchange, perhaps creating 'new types of hybridized identity that combine national cultures with global ideas and images' (Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997:10). The transnational Hindu diaspora creates the setting for the production of such identity.

In March 2005, Sony Asia sponsored an event at the Royal Albert Hall in London titled *Gujarat - A Celebration*. The first of its kind in London, attracting over 5,000 people, predominately Gujaratis from many different caste groups, the evening's programme was a showcase to 'celebrate the culture of the Gujarati people, their folk music and dance' (programme note, 2005:4) and was organised under the auspices of the Asian Music Circle. Sony Asia's Executive Vice-President stated in the programme that 'We look forward to bringing tonight's event to millions of viewers across the world – a truly global celebration for a very global community' (ibid:2). The dichotomy between this commercially global corporation and the local tribal dances of the *Mher* warrior community of the Saurashtra region of Gujarat was depicted starkly during the group's presentation, danced to the music of their local folk musicians, dressed in their local traditional clothes. The sense of locality was reinforced too when they were cheered on enthusiastically by those members of the audience from the same Gujarati caste group. The fact too that the evening was conducted by the compere mainly in Gujarati only added to the sense of the local culture subsumed within a global transnational corporation. As Cvetkovich and Kellner comment:

Global culture involves promoting lifestyle, consumption, products and identities...expansion of private cable and satellite systems have aggressively promoted a commercial culture throughout the world. In a sense, culture itself is being redefined...

Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997:8

4.8 Voices of the young people

Thirty-two Asian girls and young women, and one young man (white) who were training in South Asian dance in Leicester in 2003 with different teachers, were given a questionnaire asking for information on their dance training and their attitudes to and their conceptions of South Asian dance (Appendix 4). Their ages ranged from twelve to twenty-five and they had studied dance from between five months to fifteen years. All of them performed in Leicester (March 2003) in a programme called *Uttisava* (celebration or festival), a new showcase project for young South Asian dancers, funded by East Midlands Arts through the CICD. The financial support enabled the CICD to run a three-year initiative to develop training projects for talented young dancers across the region, and *Uttisava* was the first major event of this new enterprise to take place. These young performers interviewed had all studied some classical South Asian dance technique – nine had learnt Kathak and the rest Bharatanatyam, and approximately half of the group also learnt Indian folk dances, and some contemporary/creative Indian dance. Of the thirty-three respondents, three had studied dance in India in addition to their lessons in Leicester and two had taken extra lessons in London and Birmingham; most of the group had worked to a syllabus and taken exams of varying levels.

The results of twenty-one of the thirty-two respondents are shown in the tables in Appendix 4. [See also accompanying DVD Track 3 for film extracts of dance teaching in Leicester.]

Figure 15. Young dancers in Leicester rehearsing for *Uttisava* performance, March 2003.

In relation to the questions in the questionnaires of the perception of the meaning of the dance, out of the thirty-two Hindu respondents only five thought dance was not an expression of their Hindu faith, stating that it ‘was just a hobby’, and ‘I do it because I love it’, or ‘it is just a way of expressing yourself.’ Those that believed it to be a way of communicating their faith or religion did not necessarily view the religious aspect as important to them. They spoke of how dance can portray the devotion to God, of its religious significance at festivals such as *Navratri*, of the part that it plays in their cultural heritage, and that it enables too their own, inner faith to be expressed. This was not seen as synonymous with religion. Bhavini, aged fifteen, wrote: ‘Bharatanatyam is a devotional dance to Siva. I am not that religious so I perform dance as my hobby and faith from inside my heart’. Ten girls thought dance had a key part to play in maintaining tradition and culture, and three others suggested that dance created a route for prayer. Twenty of those completing the questionnaires indicated that they had danced in a temple, one in India, and the others in Leicester, mainly at the time of *Navratri*.

These comments reflect evidence found in other surveys and research (eg. Modood et al 1994) of a significant change in second generation beliefs in relation to religion, family and social contacts, work practices and marriage partners, particularly among South Asians. Although religion was often acknowledged to be important by the second generation respondents, 'it was a religion of private spirituality and a code of behaviour in terms of personal conduct' (Modood 1994:50) and considered to be a more personal affair than regular attendance at the temple. The dance students interviewed in Leicester about their attitudes to dance were primarily dancing because they loved it, and therefore the filmi, creative and semi-classical styles were as interesting and valid to them as the classical styles. Rekha, aged fifteen wrote that she preferred filmi dance because 'it is one dance style within which you incorporate many others', and Beena, aged twelve, gave the following reason why folk dance is her favourite: 'it is exciting and you can do any moves you like.' Another, aged twenty-five wrote that 'Bharatanatyam is more sophisticated and Bollywood is more freestyle'.

Although these girls were all South Asian, they mixed freely at school and in their workplaces with young people from different backgrounds, and several spoke too of enjoying disco dance. Modood notes here the changes in socialisation patterns amongst South Asians:

It is clear that a significant generational change has taken place in the pattern of social contacts. The result of being brought up and educated in Britain was a social life centred less on the extended family and ethnic community and more on activities connected with work or educational institution. Consequently, the patterns of contact tended to be more diffuse and diverse than those of the first generation.

Modood et al 1994:27

It is obvious too, that the attendance at lavishly-celebrated Hindu festivals such as *Navratri*, for all these young people, created a significant impact on them as to the intrinsic nature of Hinduism and their process of socialisation into it. The attractive nature of such events brings enthusiastic attendance, and even if the primary feature for the young is not the religious factor, participation and understanding can be found on many levels, and significant aspects of Hindu belief, culture, social mores are without doubt transmitted. It is an arena where 'cultural definitions are experienced, constructed, negotiated and contested' (Nodwell 1996:29).

4.9 Dance examination systems

Three systems of examinations in South Asian dance were used by the Leicester dance teachers. For Kathak the British-based but internationally-used ISTD (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing) syllabus had been selected. This syllabus emerged out of a lengthy period of research and consultation with Akademi and the Arts Council, and is administered through a new faculty of the ISTD set up in 1999 to examine Kathak and Bharatanatyam (Prickett 2004). In 2000 Grades 1-6 were offered and examinations began. For studies in Bharatanatyam in Leicester, two alternative examination systems were employed. One was the UK-based *Sangit Preparatory Examinations*, established in 1987 by the Pandit Ram Sahai Sangit Vidyalaya, a charitable trust, in consultation with Indian examiners and ethnomusicologist Dr Francis Shepherd. The *Sangit* qualifications have equivalence with qualifications of Trinity College, London and are therefore accredited by UK standards. Magdalen Gorringer notes that:

An additional advantage for those taking these examinations within the UK is that the syllabi for the Sangit Preparatory also cover the examination elements required for GCSE and A level – so that pupils can use their training in Indian music, bharatanatyam or kathak to cover part of their GCSE and A level in music or dance.

Gorringer 2003:13

These exams can be used also as a preparation for the *Prayag Sangit Samiti*, the second examination system used for the Bharatanatyam style (also available for Kathak). Founded in India in 1926, it has Levels 1-8, and the top levels from 6-8 are equivalent to undergraduate degrees. It is recognised in India, and for any examinations held in the UK examiners are brought over from India.

All the young people interviewed in Leicester who were learning Kathak had taken ISTD exams Grades 1-3 and one more advanced student had taken Grade 4. Of the girls training in Bharatanatyam, ten had taken the first grades of the *Prayag Sangit Samiti*, and six had taken the Junior Diploma, Level 1 of the *Sangit Preparatory Examinations*. Ten had not taken any exams, either because they had recently started their training, or they were mainly learning folk dances.

4.10 Past, present and future: the Leicester experience

An interrogation has been made of the nature of the history and settlement of the Asian population in Leicester, focussing on the unique amalgam of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims resident in the city, and indicating the nature and effect of this balance with its dominant Hindu majority. The effects of the mass expulsion of East African Asians from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in the 1960s and their settlement in the UK and in Leicester have been examined. Leicester's rapid growth as a 'multicultural city' is noted whilst acknowledging the problematic nature of such a term. It is not a simplistic model, and care is needed to recognise the differentiation and complexities of backgrounds, languages and social practices within the Asian community.

The majority of the Asian Hindus in Leicester are of Gujarati descent and this research acknowledges the particular characteristics of this community of Asians and their attitudes to work, religion, cultural and social traditions, which impacts too, on the dance practices embedded both in religious worship and at secular events. Organisational experience in business, social groups and temple worship in East Africa has endowed the Gujaratis with a confidence to establish social and cultural and religious groups in the UK more rapidly than other Hindu groups. The changing nature of Hindu worship in the UK and its impact on Hindu religious festivals where dance occurs has been examined and discussed, noting in particular the festival of *Navratri*.

The history of Asian dance events in Leicester looks back to the 1960s and reveals how cultural and religious occasions, with their related dance performances, were soon organised, albeit on a small scale. Up to the 1980s, classical Indian dance had a very low profile, and it was not until the arrival of teacher and performer in Kathak, Nilima Devi, from India that interest in the classical dance forms began to grow. Leicester Council's support for the teaching of Asian music and dance in schools and community centres gave additional support to the growth of dance practices, and now in the early part of the twenty-first century, there is a thriving community of dancers, teachers and young students.

Fieldwork carried out in 2003 revealed that a small majority of these young students focus on the classical dance forms, pursuing the study on a relatively serious basis by participating in the examination system as well as regular classes and some performance work. This included one non-Asian boy who was learning Kathak with Nilima Devi. Other students, all girls and young women, preferred to concentrate on the folk, filmi and creative forms of South Asian dance with their teachers, often choreographing items of Bollywood dance for community or social events. Many young girls did not go to dance teachers but learnt their dances from the Asian videos widely available (see Chapter Seven). Several of the teachers interviewed spoke with some regret at the lack of serious interest in the classical forms of dance, but had decided to teach creative, filmi and semi-classical forms so that they would retain their students. This also influenced their performances.

Leicester's Asian dance scene is clearly a thriving, but changing one, with the folk dance practices of *Navratri* that are important to the Gujarati community featuring prominently. Elsewhere, in performance and in classes, Indian folk dance, Bollywood and creative (semi-classical) forms are widely disseminated, and lack of interest in and lack of knowledge of the classical forms was generally the case. One of the classical teachers was insistent that generally people did not really know the difference between classical and other dance forms. This view was again confirmed by a male Gujarati informant involved in the arts who spoke of how he saw the Leicester Gujarati community as still rather conservative in its views. He described how there remained a certain level of wariness and fear, and a degree of poverty, as many of these Asians remain employed in factory work. His assessment was that only five per cent of the community has any substantial wealth, and that it would take another twenty years for real change – a transformation that will occur only when this present younger generation who are becoming professionals are established with families.

Having presented the fieldwork carried out in the Leicester Gujarati Hindu community, and some analysis of the evidence gleaned in the field, I now, in Chapter Five, introduce the ethnography of the Tamil Hindu community, centred in Greater London. As a second

case-study, the chapter does not seek to emphasise the differences between the two groups, but attempts to understand the varied migration patterns and UK settlement history of the Tamils in the light of diasporic pressures. This is viewed through the lens of the community's dance practices, asking how these movement forms express the group's cultural, ethnic and religious beliefs.

Notes:

¹ The 2001 government census for England and Wales offered four categories for South Asian 'minority ethnic' groups, under the heading of Asian, or British Asian: 'Indian', 'Pakistani', 'Bangladeshi' or 'Other Asian'. Chinese formed a separate category. The new question on religious identity which was answered by over 92% of the population offered eight choices: Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Other Religion, or No Religion. Professor Paul Weller was part of the academic consultative panel for the census and has commented on the detailed nature of the pre-census discussion with regard to the 'religious question' and of its problematic nature (Weller 2004; see also Brown 2000).

² The 1991 government census for England and Wales contained one question on ethnicity, and none on religion. 1991 results in Leicester show an Indian population of 23.8 per cent (65,660) of the total population. The 2001 census offered three questions on the topic of religion and ethnicity, and responses to the question on religion were optional. There has been, however, serious debate over the formulation and categorisations of the 'ethnic question' (see Ballard 1997) and the 'religious questions' (see Weller above).

³ Statistics are taken from the March (2003) summaries of the 2001 government census on www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001 [accessed 22.2.03].

⁴ Panayi notes that in 1956, 92% of all Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK were male, and for other Indians 79%. By 1964, the numbers had decreased to 90% and 69%. Then by 1975, 65% of Pakistanis were male, and 56% of other Indians (1999:17).

⁵ *Gurdwara* - Sikh place of worship, literally 'gateway of the Guru'.

⁶ *Bhangra* - A Punjabi word describing a lively form of folk music and dance from the Punjab.

⁷ Some UK East African Gujarati respondents interviewed for this research spoke of their real home being Kenya, as they had their roots there for several generations. 'India is unknown, is foreign to us' they told me. They return to Kenya as often as funds permit, and retain land and properties there. They have also been involved in the setting up and establishing of a new *Swaminarayan* temple in Kenya, which opened in September 2004. (author's fieldnotes 16.10.04).

⁸ Recently released government papers (under the 30 year rule) have revealed that at the time of the Ugandan expulsion, the UK Conservative government was seeking a 'safe' island for deportation of the Asian peoples that would have been an alternative British territory, such as the Solomon Islands or Falkland Islands. In the end, the idea was dismissed. Japan, India and Australia all refused entry to the Asian immigrants: 80,000 Ugandan Asians went to Canada and South Africa and approximately 25,000 to the UK. (www.bbc.co.uk [accessed 1.1.03]).

⁹ A caste name from Gujarat. 'Patidar, meaning landholder, was originally a term for some Kanbis [a widely spread agricultural caste] who had become tax-collectors under the Mogals. Under the British ...they became quite prosperous. In 1931 they insisted on being described, in the census, as Patidars rather than Kanbis' (Tambis-Lyche 1980:32). Most Patidars carry the surname Patel. They became one of the biggest communities of Indians in East Africa.

¹⁰ ISKCON - The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or Hare Krishna movement, which was founded by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in the 1960s in the USA, and attracts both western and Asian followers. The first temple was established in Britain in 1969. It is now a worldwide organisation.

¹¹ Vaishnavite – Devotees of God Vishnu, and the largest, numerically, part of mainstream Hinduism, which is divided up into several sects. 'Vaishnavism is characterised by *upasana* (ritual worship)...Vaishnavas subscribe to *ahimsa* (non-violence), vegetarianism, selfless and active altruism. Vaishnavism has brought forth an extremely rich literature both in Sanskrit and Indian vernaculars as well as artistic productions (music, dance, sculpture, architecture)' (Klostermaier 1998:196).

¹² This temple, now called the Shree Shakti Mandir, was originally named the Shyama Temple after the woman guru who started it, Shyama Devi. She had visited Zambia and so it held an attraction for refugees from there. It is believed to be the first Hindu temple in Britain, as well as the first in Leicester.

¹³ This was a survey carried out initially in 2002, documenting all the places of worship in Leicester, and was updated in 2004 (Stokes 2004). It remains difficult to ascertain the exact number of Hindu temples, as several community centres where worship takes place are included.

¹⁴ *Swaminarayan* – Literally means 'Lord God'. The name is the title of a religious movement founded in Gujarat, India by Sahajanand Swami who lived in the late eighteenth century (1781-1830). The term is also used as a title for the founder. The present leader is Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

¹⁵ *Sanatan* - eternal, unchanging. The term is now used more generally by modern Hindus to describe their religion.

¹⁶ Large *Swaminarayan* temples are being built all over the world. In December 2004 I visited the site of the new *Swaminarayan* temple complex in Delhi, due to be opened late 2005. At that time, there were over 5,000 Rajasthani workers on the 60-acre site, carving statues, mixing concrete, carrying bricks, sanding stones, polishing marble, and other heavy work. The plans are for one large and one smaller temple, an Imax cinema (for showing devotional films), a library, a mansion residence for Pramukh Swami Maharaj for his visits, a housing complex for devotees, a restaurant and gardens with fountains and resting places. The whole complex is designed to accommodate up to 8,000 visitors every day and people will enter with a paid ticket giving them access to all, or just part of the site.

¹⁷ *Satsanga* -association or intercourse with the good, with truth; a religious gathering of devotees to listen to spiritual teachings.

¹⁸ Swamis in *Swaminarayan* - The core of the *Swaminarayan* movement is made up of celibate male ascetics, 'who have various duties, particularly priesthood in the order's temples, religious study, and touring the region to preach and collect funds' (Fuller 1992:172). The *Swaminarayan* followers call them 'saints'. Like the present leader of the Bochasanwasi ShreeAkshar-Purushottam branch of the organisation, the male ascetics are not allowed to see, look at or touch women as the first of their five basic vows is one of absolute celibacy and avoidance of women. For further discussion, see Williams 1984.

¹⁹ Jacobsen (2004) discusses the creation of *tirthas*, sacred places by the Tamil Hindu community in Norway. He also comments on Bradford Hindu Cultural Society's application to use part of the river Aire (north England) to scatter ashes after Hindu cremations. This would, for the Hindus, make the river sacred by turning it into the holy river Ganga (2004:146).

²⁰ See the temple's own website for further information www.skandavale.org.

²¹ *Divali* – a shortened Sanskrit term meaning a 'cluster of lights'. This popular 'festival of lights' falls in late autumn and draws together many different traditions. For some it is a celebration of the end of the rainy season and a welcoming of the sun; for others it ushers in the new year and sees out the old; some devotees worship the goddess Lakshmi during this period, and many others celebrate the homecoming of Rama and Sita after their exile, from the epic story of the *Ramayana* (see Jackson and Nesbitt 1993, and Davis 1996).

²² *Jati* (Hindi) - sub-caste, an endogamous group with a hereditary occupation. *Sampradaya* –a 'handing on'; a guru-led movement such as *Swaminarayan* or ISKCON.

²³ The Hindu lunar calendar uses a system of dividing the 12 months into movements of the moon, and each lunar month is again divided into two halves – the 'bright' half which begins the day after the new moon, and the 'dark' half, starts the day after the full moon. *Magha* is our January/February; *Phalgun* is February/March; *Chaitra* is March/April; *Vaishaka* is April/May; *Jyaistha*, May/June; *Asadha*, June/July; *Sravana* is July/August; *Bhadra*, August/September; *Asvin*, September/October; *Kartikka*, October/November; *Magasirsa*, November/December and *Pausa* is December/January. The light, bright period of the month is considered auspicious, and the dark or waning period malevolent. See Fuller 1980, Klostermaier 1998:119 and Merrey, 1982 for further details.

²⁴ *Arati* – A common form of devotional worship that entails moving lighted camphor or oil lamps in a circular motion in front of the deity.

²⁵ The Leicester Hindu Festival Council was formed in 1990 and emerged out of the Gujarat Hindu Association with a specific brief to organise the large Hindu festivals in conjunction with the City Council. Its main aims and objectives are: 'to celebrate Hindu festivals; to promote goodwill, unanimity and harmonious relationships amongst the various sectors of Leicester's Community by organising programmes of social, cultural, recreational and leisure activities; to enhance the profile of the Hindu community in Leicestershire; to speak as one voice on Hindu issues, and to encourage our younger generation to digest the rich traditional values of our culture and religion.' (Champaneria 2003:31).

The Gujarat Hindu Association, formed in 1967 provides support and advice to its membership of over 40 Gujarati Hindu organisations, promotes Hindu festivals through its affiliated organisation

(above), and 'takes a lead role in development of social, cultural and educational projects in communities in Leicester' (Champaneria 2002:29).

²⁶ Funding to support these events is offered by Leicester City Council. They pay for the hire of the Ramgarhia Hall – a cost of £20,000 in 2003. The council also covers the costs of the *Divali* festivities at around £30-40,000.

²⁷ An Indian-based guru, living in Andhra Pradesh who has thousands of devotees worldwide, including many westerners. He is famous in the media for apparently producing various articles and sacred dust from his finger-tips. There are over fifty Sai Baba centres in the UK attended by Hindus from different traditions including Gujaratis and Tamils and some westerners.

²⁸ The Ratha Yatra Hindu festival, believed to be the oldest street festival in the world, 'annually attracts three million people to the Indian city of Puri to commemorate the return of Lord Krishna to his home in Vrindavan. Now, similar festivals take place in 100 cities worldwide' (Leicester Mercury 27.7.03). The Leicester festival, now in its sixth year, is one of five staged in the UK, the others being in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Brighton.

²⁹ See endnote 25 above in relation to funding for this event.

³⁰ *Raas/Garba* competitions feature in Hindu Gujarati groups all over the world. Nodwell writes that 'Vancouver's Gujarati Society hosted the second annual Western Canada and Seattle Garba and Ras [sic] competition. Of the more than 300 participating dancers, about a third were young men and boys' (1996:28).

Although the competition is a secular event, the Leicester *Raas/Garba* competition I watched in September 2003 displayed trappings of a religious function. A small shrine to the goddess Durga was set up on the stage, prayers were recited and the audience participated in the singing of the hymn to Durga (which is always sung during religious *arati*). Before the competition began, two dancers performed a Bharatanatyam invocatory prayer.

³¹ This *Navratri* event held at Kingsbury School, near Wembley, north London was organised by a Patel Samaj that had broken away from a larger association three years before. It consists of people originally from a community of six villages in Gujarat, India. The committee holds office for two years and runs their AGM at Wandsworth Town Hall in south-west London every November. At their AGM, they will hold the meeting, then partake of a communal meal with dance and musical entertainment. No profit is made on the *Navratri* event, but money is raised for the hire of the hall and the musicians from raffles, donations, sponsorship and a £2.00 entry ticket.

³² For further details on this project and a fuller discussion on South Asian dance in higher education in the UK, see David 2003.

³³ Sony Entertainment Television Asia is a 24-hour cable and satellite television channel which broadcasts Asian news, culture and sport into over 75, 000 homes in the UK and globally to over 100 countries including South Africa, USA, Saudi Arabia and Europe. It is watched by 14.8 million viewers in India, and claims 'to provide the best in Hindi family entertainment'. (www.setasia.com. accessed 10.8.05)

CHAPTER FIVE: Tamil London

5.1 The Tamil language as a cultural marker

Milk, clear honey, coarse sugar and porridge – these all four
in a mixture
I give to you, O pure Ruby, whose elephant head is striking
because of its swaying decorated trunk;
you, in return, must give to me the Academic [pure] Tamil that
is threefold.

Prayer to the elephant God, Ganapati, 12th century,
cited in Kersenboom 1995:6

This prayer to Lord Ganapati, Ganesha or Vinayaka, a popular figure in Tamil worship, is taught to and committed to memory by students learning Tamil as a reminder of the conviction of the divine nature of the Tamil language. At the heart of Tamil Hindu aesthetics is the belief in the purity of the language, which when uttered, is thought to be vibrant with divine presence. It is literally as if God himself incarnates through the language. The Dravidian Tamil language has a diglossic form: firstly is the classical, academic, pure and auspicious Tamil (*centamil*) which has its heritage in the past, and the other, named *kotuntamil* (meaning bent, uneven, crooked) which is considered impure, is the language of everyday speech containing regional dialects and is subject to change. This common form of the language does not generate the power of the divine presence, unlike the academic, pure form of *centamil*. *Centamil*, the auspicious language, also has a two-fold structure. It manifests as the pure, classical form of the ancient Tamil literature, and a ‘higher’ spoken form used in education, speech-making and writing, which is sometimes called modern standard literary Tamil. This differentiates Tamil from other languages with a diglossic structure whose ‘higher’ form is an archaic, unspoken language remaining solely in classical texts, or ‘confined to a particular religious/ritual use’ (Pandian 1987:44). Pandian describes how, even today, nearly all Tamil speakers will make a distinction in their spoken language between the pure and

impure Tamil, and ‘they accept literary Tamil as pure Tamil and through education they may strive to participate in its use.’ (ibid:44)

An examination of the ancient Tamil classical texts, thought to have been written between the third century BC and the third century AD, indicates that the Tamil people even at that time strongly defined themselves through their language. The language of the grammar was thought to be a parallel to the language of life, and a famous medieval grammatical treatise, *Akopparul*, defines Tamil both as ‘sweet’ and as a ‘woman’. Not only at that time, but also today, evidence reveals that ‘language is a feature that pervades Tamil society and Tamil culture, indeed all aspects of Tamil life in a way that has no equivalent in most other cultures’ (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1999:121). The notion that the Tamil language is an identity marker for Tamil life is expressed through the concept of *muttamil*, a three-fold description of the language as a ‘lived’ life. Here, Bharatanatyam dancer and scholar, Saskia Kersenboom describes the essence of *muttamil* in a detailed analysis of textural traditions of the east and west, and reveals too the extent of the relationship between language and the expression of dance.

As early as the sixth century AD the Tamils defined their language as being threefold: *Muttamil* (literally ‘three Tamil’), comprising word, music and mimetic dance. The natural consequences of this definition imply that the Tamil language assumes its full scope only in expressions cast in three medial *forms*...

Kersenboom 1995: xvi

The close correspondence of the Tamil language and Tamil dance practices is again noted by Kersenboom when she describes how the lyrical poems of early Tamil literature were expressed in dance form by the *devadasis* in the temples and in the royal courts, and these poems are still in use by today’s Bharatanatyam dancers e.g. *Bhairavai varnam* ‘*mohamana*’.¹ The *varnam* (an item in a Bharatanatyam recital consisting of both pure dance and lyrical expression) is cited in some of the oldest Tamil texts and the performances by the *devadasis* ‘then seems to have been as rich and effective as the impact of *varnams* in our times’ (Kersenboom 1995:49).

The fact that the ‘performance’ of the language is inherent in its description (e.g. *muttamil*) is given scant attention today, and it is only scholars such as Kersenboom who

have dedicated their academic investigations to ‘the concept *Muttamil* and its implications for the Tamil language and its literature’ (ibid :xvi). Kersenboom indicates how the dancer, as interpreter, dances the Tamil text and so becomes ‘the text as an ultimate act of interpretation’ (ibid:104). The dancer is not only the text and the interpreter, but is the context and the representation of the text transcending both time and space in performance. Even the mythological story of the supposed origins of dance in India given in the *Natyashastra*, tells of how the dance/drama was created so that ordinary people who had no access to the teachings of the great *Vedas*, could understand the knowledge conveyed in them through a visual and sensory form. So a fifth *Veda* evolved, using words from the *Rigveda*, music from the *Samaveda*, movements and make-up from the *Yajurveda* and *abhinaya* (emotional expression) from *Atharvaveda*.² This description is of the creation of a language of action, expressing the speech, poetry, emotional content and rhythm of the Tamil text and bringing it directly into the present experience through the dance, or mimetic form.³

Further evidence of the significant role played by dance is found in the frequent references of the early Tamil texts, such as the third century classic *Cilappatikaram*, the twelfth century *Periyapuranam* and many others. As Pandian states:

The literature of the first period (identified as the classical or sangham literature is to a large extent world-affirming and naturalistic. Descriptions of music and dance, ethics and morality, grammatical rules and standards of pure Tamil...constitute the bulk of this literature.

Pandian 1987:48

In a contemporary light, dance scholar and performer Rajika Puri, discussing the expression of meaning in Bharatanatyam, argues that a direct relationship exists ‘between Bharatanatyam *abhinaya* and the everyday body language of Tamil society’ (1998:249). She describes how many of the gestures of this classical dance form are part of the daily south Indian (Tamil) life and are therefore action signs that carry particular cultural knowledge. Familiarity with this socio-cultural system, or ““general cultural knowledge” underlies both the everyday body language of Indian (specifically South Indian) society and Bharatanatyam’ (ibid:252). This applies not only to the dancer but also to the understanding of the spectators. The language of the dance is the language of the Tamil

life and culture. One of the Bharatanatyam dance luminaries of the twentieth century, Balasaraswati, who came from the *devadasi* caste spoke of her understanding of the relationship between Tamil language and music, and the dance form of Bharatanatyam:⁴

There is a special relationship between Tamil music and Bharatanatyam. The Tamil lyrics of Muthuthandavar, Ganam Krishna Iyer and Subbarama Iyer lend themselves wonderfully well for dancing with intense participation. It is the distinguishing feature of Tamil music that compositions, coming in an unbroken line from the Vaishnava and Shaiva saints through Gopalakrishna Bharathi down to composers of our time, are replete with moods and feelings suitable for abhinaya. As far as I know, Bharatanatyam is bhakti [devotion]; Tamil is nothing but bhakti. I believe therefore, that Tamil and bhakti are part of the same tradition.

Balasaraswati, cited in Menon 1982:36

In this way Bala ‘rooted Bharata Natyam in a continuous tradition of southern Indian dance, music and literature’ and constructed ‘a Tamil legacy for the dance form’ (O’Shea 2001:118). This was in contrast to dance innovator and re-structuralist, Rukmini Devi, the founder of the famous *Kalakshetra* school of dance, who called Bharatanatyam a ‘national’ dance, stressing a pan-Indian culture and tradition. Her vision for the revival of Indian classical dance ‘correlated to a “neo-Hindu” spiritualization of national identity’ (ibid:108) and denied its Tamil identity.

The powerful identification maintained by the Tamils with their language has been upheld strongly not only by those living in Tamil Nadu, India, but by the Tamils in Sri Lanka and in the diaspora.⁵ William McGowan, an American writer who lived and travelled extensively in Sri Lanka in the 1980s states that:

To Sri Lankan Tamils, their Tamil dialect was the most pure, the closest remaining cousin to the Tamil that was spoken in the ninth century in India, a tongue that had been referred to, in the classical literature of the time, as “a goddess”. The Tamil language, they claimed, was the oldest, richest, most copious, refined, and polished language spoken by man – more polished than Greek, more copious than Latin.

McGowan 1993:173

The importance of this to the Tamils cannot be stressed enough. The Tamil language has in effect, become a powerful ethnic and cultural identity marker, an emblem of Tamil nationality that unites Tamils across the diaspora. This sense of national identity carries an unspoken undertaking to defend and protect Tamil language and culture in all situations. Examples are manifold: in India in 1956 when Hindi was pronounced the

official language, several young men in Tamil Nadu immolated themselves in protest; language policy changes in Sri Lanka⁶ at the same time sparked violent clashes between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities; and on a contemporary note, a researcher for the SADiB project visiting a Saturday Tamil School in London, noted that the children's day began with an assembly where they all sang 'a song/anthem called *Yengum Tamizh Mozhi*,⁷ which is about five minutes solid extolling the virtues of Tamil' (Gorringe, SADiB fieldnotes 2000b). All the classes at the school were held in Tamil, and two of the main objectives of the school were i) 'to promote the Tamil language, and ii) to prove the Tamil identity through language, culture and tradition' (fieldnotes as above). This researcher commented too that there was a conspicuous aim in the school to be able to communicate in Tamil, and added wryly that her Tamil husband when a boy, had been refused *mrdangam* (south Indian drum) lessons because his Tamil was not good enough to follow what was going on.

The adherence to and faith in the cultural identity of Tamil reflects the aspirations of the Tamil people (and particularly Tamil nationalists) that Tamil be accorded the status of Sanskrit. This is the notion of the supreme authority and 'perfection' of Sanskrit:

Throughout India's history, Sanskrit, the "well-formed" language, has been the pre-eminent medium for religion, philosophy, commentary, poetry, epics, and even for the gods to speak to one another. As A.K.Ramanujan (1981:136) succinctly puts it: "Sanskrit was culture".

Prentiss 1999:26

These claims are not generally accepted by the Tamils in the south of India and debates still rage today over claims of which is the older of the languages and which has had the greater influence over the other. In fact, both languages are carriers of rich intellectual and literary traditions and have borrowed heavily from each other. Articles in the monthly *Tamil Tribune*⁸ have condemned the Indian government for actively promoting Hindi and Sanskrit and the expenditure of vast sums of money to create the 'Year of Sanskrit' in 1999-2000. The government refused approaches by the Tamil Nadu State Government and some political parties in Tamil Nadu to declare a 'Year of Tamil' or to promote Tamil as a classical language. During my discussions with the president of the London Sri Murugan Temple in East Ham on Sanskrit/Tamil issues, this particular

political debate was raised and the temple president commented on the strong reaction in south India to the government's imposition of the Hindi language. At the East Ham temple, many devotees do not understand the Sanskrit prayers, and would like them to be recited in Tamil.⁹ So far this has not taken place, but on Friday evenings, *bhajans* are sung in Tamil. The president also spoke of the London Sivan Kovil temple in Lewisham (south-east London) where Tamil prayers and *archanas* have been introduced.

In four of the five London Tamil temples I have made frequent visits to, the printed notices pinned up are in Tamil and Tamil was mainly spoken at events. The fifth, the Ghanapathy Temple in Wimbledon hosts a website written in English, printed notices in both Tamil and English at the temple, and explanations at festivals and cultural evenings in English. These differences may well be due to the fact that the founder's family who are now responsible for the running of the temple, were not brought up speaking Tamil, as their parents, settling in the UK in the 1960s were advised that the children should just learn English. The children's dance syllabi used at this temple are in Tamil and English. Yet the quarterly *Tamil Community Newsletter* produced by the London Sath Sangham, a Harrow-based Tamil weekend school is written predominately in Tamil, (it is called bilingual, but in fact only one out of six articles is in English) and two or three of the major Tamil information websites are likewise solely in Tamil. As the majority of the Tamil Hindu population in London and Greater London is Sri Lankan, the particularity of the Sri Lankan identity with their language becomes an essential factor for examination.

This crucial issue of language as a cultural boundary marker has played a major part in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict during the fifty-seven years since independence, and has driven a deeper wedge into the age-old Tamil-Sinhala rivalry. Changes in language with the 'Sinhala-Only' policy in 1956 increased Tamil fears that the 'essence of their national and ethnic consciousness' (Silva 1999:18) would be eroded and it raised anxieties too that they would be disadvantaged in their professional and administrative jobs. Thornton and Niththyananthan, writing in 1984 on the problems in Sri Lanka, stressed how significant this language change was:

For the Tamils, the Sinhala-only act was a disaster. They had always had a commitment to their ancient language that went deep into their national

consciousness. Their language was a definition of their identity and status as a people, the most powerful symbol of the antiquity of their race and the repository of its culture and history.

Thornton and Niththyananthan 1984:17

In 1996, statistics from the Asian Media Information¹⁰ showed that the registered number of newspapers published in Sinhalese was seventy-eight, and in Tamil, twenty-three. The total number of titles of publications in Sinhalese was 1,593 and only 348 in Tamil, the figures indicating the continuing domination of the press by the Sinhala language, despite a relaxation of state controls of the media in 1993. Up to this date, the situation was an unstable and violent one:

From 1988 to 1993 the media and media persons were under threat from both the state and the insurgents. After 1990 the latter threat has receded, but the former continued with even greater intensity against the independent media. Intimidation and violence were rampant, with an occasional violent death of media persons. Intimidation in particular would take many forms, such as physical violence, and legal and administrative harassment.

Wijetunga 1998:171

The fundamental democratic right of freedom of the press (and to publish in any language) was a central issue of the 1994 General and Presidential elections, yet it still remains a contentious topic. Further changes in educational policy in the early 1970s, limiting Tamil admissions to university¹¹ only added to the growing deterioration in ethnic relations. Although the Sinhalese outnumbered the Tamils by four to one, the community has always harboured fears of being overrun by the Tamils, effectively creating in Sri Lanka an insecure majority (Sinhalese), and a Tamil 'well-entrenched minority' (Silva 1999:7) who long to be the majority. The situation is without doubt a highly complex one, involving not only language and education issues, but religious factors, separatist aspirations, and long historical memories of tensions and conflicts. An uneasy peace on the island has been negotiated since 2002 through the mediation of international peace keepers, following the 'protracted and violent armed conflict that left an estimated 70,000 people dead, compromised economic development, and produced large and sustained migrant flows' (Sriskandarajah 2002:284).

5.2 Sri Lankan Tamil history and migration patterns

Tamil migration has a particularly long history, giving a context through which to view the more recent immigration patterns. After Sri Lanka gained independence from Britain in 1948, there was a small influx into the UK of Sri Lankan Tamils arriving to study with the aim of returning home. As tensions increased in Sri Lanka in 1956 when the 'Sinhala-Only' language policy came into operation, and riots against the Tamil community took place in the following years, many professional Tamils left the island for the UK where they joined the small community of students. The majority of these new arrivals were the sons of the wealthy Vellalar¹² caste, fluent English speakers with a good education. Their professional status and linguistic skills enabled them to find employment relatively easily in the UK in the National Health Service (NHS) as doctors and also in private practices of lawyers and accountants. Steadily developing discrimination against Tamils in Sri Lanka in employment opportunities and university admissions in the late 1960s and early 1970s forced a greater number of both students and job-seeking young Tamil men to emigrate to England and to Europe as well as Australia, Canada and the USA. When rioting erupted in 1977 in Sri Lanka, these numbers were increased by men leaving to escape the violence. Their facility with English and their education were not as extensive as their predecessors which brought employment difficulties for them in the UK. This particular phase of migration, however, was tempered both by policies in Sri Lanka that restricted the movements of professionally qualified Tamils, and by the UK's tighter immigration laws that had just come into force.

The intense fighting of 1983-4, during which it is claimed by the Tamils that over 1,500 of their number were killed by the Sinhalese in just one month, led to a huge exodus of Tamils from the island. By the late 1980s and early 1990s it is estimated that over 1.5 million Sri Lankan Tamils left their homes, mostly never to return to live. Because of the forced nature of the exodus, these Tamils became refugees or asylum seekers, ending up in adverse conditions in refugee camps and asylum centres. Chris McDowell's analysis, *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora* (1996), reveals that during this forced migration period of 1983-1991, 100,000 Tamils from Sri Lanka went to North America (including Canada);

160,000 went to India; 7-10,000 to Australia, 2-3,000 to Singapore and Malaysia and 200,000 to Western Europe, including 17,000 to Britain. The approximate numbers of population in Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora in 2003 were: Sri Lanka – more than 2 million (was over 3 million in 1981); India – more than 60 million; Malaysia – over 6 million; Mauritius – approximately 3 million; Singapore – 2 million; South Africa – more than 1 million. Canada's Tamil population is estimated to be around 155,000, the UK's between 150,000 – 200,000 and the US, about 10,000 which consists mainly of south Indian Tamils, as their stricter immigration laws have not encouraged or allowed recent refugees from Sri Lanka. Australia's Tamils are calculated to be around 50,000 and the total in Europe, about 300,000 (personal communication with Dr Niththyananthan 6.12.03).¹³

5.3 The Tamils in London

The Tamil population in London and Greater London is the largest in the UK and although is predominately Sri Lankan in origin, is a community that includes Tamils from India, Mauritius, Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa. It is therefore not an homogenous group, but displays language differences, caste distinctions, varying immigration patterns as well as various religious calendars, systems of worship and educational backgrounds. Numbers are difficult to ascertain, as the 2001 Census in Britain did not specify Tamil ethnicity and the new religious question within the census offered simply 'Hindu' as a religious choice. Even the Tamils who have migrated here from Sri Lanka form two distinct community groups. These particular differences are denoted by the terms 'Ceylon or Sri Lankan Tamils' (sometimes also called Jaffna Tamils) – a term which describe those Tamils descended from Tamil-speaking immigrants from south India and who came to the island more than one thousand years ago - and the 'Indian' Tamils who were brought to the island by the British in the nineteenth century to work on the plantations. The first group have populated the northern (the Jaffna peninsula) and eastern part of the island and make-up two-thirds of the total Tamil inhabitants of Sri Lanka; the Indian Tamils, who live in the central and south areas as a minority group make-up the final third. Although the two groups are Hindu and speak Tamil, they have little in common and there are major caste differences;

the Sri Lankan group considering themselves higher caste in relation to the lower caste, plantation-working Indian Tamils. Their political views too, differ widely, as Allen Jones' refugee report points out:

Today, they also assume widely different stances on the separatism issue; most support for separatism comes from Ceylon Tamils, whereas Indian Tamils generally support the Sri Lankan government.

Jones 1985: 2

Donald Taylor's analysis of the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Britain states that 'the political divisions of Sri Lanka were and are reflected among the Tamils in Britain' (1991:206). Differences between moderates and hardliners, between those who wish for political settlement with the Sinhalese government and those that favour war, and those who support the formation of a separate state of Tamil Eelam are powerful divisive factors. These factors appear to have a significant influence on the UK Tamil community today.

Asylum seekers from Sri Lanka still continue to arrive in Britain, despite the government's decision in June 2003 to add Sri Lanka to its 'White List' of countries now presumed to be safe, and despite protests from the Refugee Council¹⁴ and Amnesty International. Out of nearly 5,000 asylum seekers arriving in 2002 in the UK, the majority of them – 3,180 – came from Sri Lanka. It is estimated that nearly one quarter of the Tamil population of the UK are asylum seekers. The London Borough of Brent (north-west London) is home to the largest number of Sri Lankan Tamils, calculated to be in the region of 12,000. Brent is one of London's most culturally diverse boroughs where the non-white ethnic groups in the borough now form the majority of the population at 57%; of this total, there is a Hindu population of 17% (see Brent Council's website for further information). Tamils began to settle in the borough of Brent in Willesden, Harlesden and Neasden in the 1970s as many were students at Willesden College, and then began to move out to the areas of Kingsbury, Queensbury and Wembley. As the community grew more established, Brent became an attractive place for many more refugees, and now houses a vibrant Tamil community. There are many successful Tamil retail businesses, a Brent Tamil Association (founded in 1980), the Tamil Community Housing Association which works in partnership with Brent council, at least five

weekend Tamil schools teaching the Tamil language and fine arts subjects as well as a number of voluntary associations for Tamils. The borough has one Tamil Hindu temple – the Eelapatheeswarar Temple in Wembley - a small temple using a hall on long-term hire from the Labour Party. Other London boroughs housing a significant Tamil Hindu community are Newham (east London), named as London's most ethnically diverse borough with over 110 different languages spoken, Merton (south London), Croydon (south London), Hillingdon, and Harrow (both north-west London).

Despite the fact that majority of the London Tamils live peacefully within their local communities, between 2000 and 2003 there was a worrying escalation of violence between gangs of Sri Lankan Tamil youths in London. By May 2002, there had been four violent deaths and up to 200 other reported incidents, and in August 2003, an eighteen year-old Tamil man was murdered by other Tamil young men, the fifth to be killed in that year. The local police commander commented that 'motives for the violence were many and complex, but they included rivalry and vendettas stemming from their home villages in Sri Lanka and simple criminality' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk> accessed 5/09/03). Elders from the community expressed their concern when this latest murder was featured on the main BBC television news, as the Sri Lankans have taken great pride in their hard-working and successful status in the UK. The director of the London Tamil Centre, Dr Niththayananthan, when interviewed for the BBC news spoke of the existence of gang warfare and also suggested that the young people might have been psychologically damaged by the war in Sri Lanka. When I interviewed him later, he spoke of other causes such as drugs, language problems and difficult home conditions being major contributory factors (4.10.03). The continuing instability of Sri Lanka, the escalation of violence in London and the general residue of fear in the more recently arrived refugees certainly creates an impact on the community here. This has become very evident during this ethnographic study. Despite an outward appearance of openness and warmth, on attempting to arrange interviews, visit homes or pursue questions further, I met at times a wary, somewhat guarded and sometimes evasive response. It is hardly surprising, considering these political, historical and contemporary factors.¹⁵ Perhaps it is, as a professor on Indian law at SOAS (School of African and Oriental Studies),

University of London, commented to me, a policy of ‘strategic silences’ – a policy where an articulate, intelligent community chooses to remain silent on certain issues.¹⁶ Perhaps too, an ethnographic search for ‘meaning’ by an outsider can prove a fruitless pursuit, as Isabelle Nabokov found in her study of Tamil ritual practice. Nabokov commented that ‘at times I stumbled on what anthropologists call “blocks in native exegeses”... Participants simply had nothing further to say about a particular ritual sequence’ (Nabokov 2000:180).

5.4 Bharatanatyam dance as part of Tamil identity

‘Authenticity’ is the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism. It demands that sources, forms, style, language and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogenous and unbroken tradition.

Rushdie 1992:67

The South Asian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam has its heritage in Tamil Nadu, south India. The lyrics accompanying the dance are mainly in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit and a Tamilised Sanskrit is used for descriptions of the movement forms. Scholars and dancers acknowledge, with professional distance and some cynicism, the common view that Bharatanatyam is a marker of supposed ‘tradition’, embodying traditional Indian values. Yet for many of the South Asian diaspora community, Bharatanatyam is seen as synonymous with tradition and as a highly valued commodity. Dancer and choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh comments:

For my parents, who were typical of their generation, it was important that their daughter learned Bharata Natyam, the classical dance of India. The idea was that by doing that we kept faith with something ancient and precious about Indian culture.

Jeyasingh 1998:49

Ethnic identity, to the immigrant mind, ‘is often predicated on the “traditional” cultural values they believe are embodied by India’s classical arts’ writes Shanti Pillai (2002:17) in discussing the contemporary dance scene in Chennai and in particular, the style of Bharatanatyam. Although the heavily-weighted narrative of the glorious 3,000 year old history of Bharatanatyam has now been disputed and exposed by scholars both in the east

and west¹⁷ this view is still sustained and taught to today's younger generation of dance students. Janet O'Shea writes of this dance form appearing 'internationally as both an emblem of national and diasporic identity and as a "high art" that transcends national and linguistic boundaries' (2003:177) and comments that Bharatanatyam 'provides a means of maintaining nationalist sentiment in exile for Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada, Germany, and the UK' (ibid: 178).

The staging of exorbitantly expensive *arangetrams* (a solo debut performance after many years of intensive training) in Bharatanatyam is common amongst Tamil dance students in London, and in the world-wide diaspora environment. The word *arangetram* is Tamil and means the *erru* or ascending of the *arangam* or stage, and is written of in the third century classical Tamil text, *Cilappatikaram*¹⁸, where a young dancer only twelve years old is described giving her first performance before the king, (Gorringe 2005:91)). Instead of the *arangetram* marking the commencement of a professional dancing career, as it traditionally represented, it has become the completion of the training when the young woman stops dancing to go to university or to take up a more lucrative professional career in medicine, dentistry, accountancy or in law. (See also Schwartz 2004:89). An *arangetram*, argues Gorringe, has become 'a symbol par excellence of ethnic heritage...a cultural commodity' (2005: 97-98) enabling the parents to present not only their daughter as an accomplished and marriageable young woman, but to demonstrate their status and wealth to the community at large. Greenstein and Bharadvaj also discuss the commodification of *arangetrams* in the Indian émigré community in southern California where it is noted that the dance package guarantees 'the continuity of Indian values', reconfirms the family's "Indianness" to themselves and their community' and enables their daughters to prepare for entry into 'middle-class Indian-American life' (1998:127). One glossy, full-colour *arangetram* brochure sent to me from the U.S. had been designed so that each page represented a temple background with the photos of the teenage dancers (sisters) posed like deities on each page. This imagery confirms not only the traditional Indian origins of the dance, but highlights too the notion of the dance's religiosity, and is emphasised by the title of *Tamil Saivism* as the theme of this particular *arangetram*. The brochure states:

Tamil Saivism believes that in Siva's cosmic dance the world is created, sustained and absorbed back, in an endless cycle...Today's arangetram of Anicham and Akil will celebrate all the glorious aspects of Siva in the various forms of his manifestation.

Arangetram programme, 12.7.03

A further example is the *arangetram* of a ten year old girl that I attended in London in September 2003; here the stage set displayed a temple scene with carved arches for scenery, sculpted images of deities and large brass temple lamps on the stage.

Certainly the *arangetrams* I have watched in London revealed the financial and devotional commitment by the families involved, through from the hiring of a large hall or theatre, the refreshments for some several hundred guests, the four or five changes of elaborate silk costumes, the different sets of dance jewellery, to the full colour glossy brochures given to all members of the audience. In addition to this there are many unseen financial factors: the extra time and expense of intensive training; the payments to the musicians and the dance teacher; the gifts to everyone involved in putting on the *arangetram* and the payment for services for the Hindu priest for conducting the *puja* (see also Gaston 1996:225-227). There is no charge for the audience, and rarely any advertising in the programme. As Gorringer comments, 'While the cost of putting on the occasion described was not widely advertised, it is unlikely to have cost less than a sum most people earn in a year'¹⁹ (2005:92).

There is no doubt that the performance of an *arangetram* literally buys into the establishing of Hindu identity, or even Tamil Hindu identity, even if the dancer is herself not Hindu. An *arangetram* held at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon where the dancer and her family were Tamil Roman Catholics began with the Tamil Hindu priest conducting the Hindu *puja* on stage in front of the audience before the dance performance began. This was followed by Catholic prayers in Tamil said by Catholic Tamil priest. The on-stage shrine sported both the usual icon of Siva Nataraj and a framed image of Christ. After the dancer performed her traditional *namaskar* (a full bow dedicating the stage and the dance performance to the Hindu God of dance, Siva), she prostrated herself for a second time and crossed herself in Catholic fashion. Later in the programme she performed a specially choreographed 'Catholic' item, a Jesus *Stuti*²⁰. In an interview with one

London Tamil dance teacher (who was herself a professional Bharatanatyam dancer), she discussed with me how she will choreograph dances to suit the particular devotional path of the student – for a Sai Baba follower, she had created a devotional *bhajan*, and for a Tamil girl a piece based on Tamil *Tevaram* poetry (author's fieldnotes 12.3.03).

The director of education at one of the London Tamil Sunday schools where Bharatanatyam is one of the most popular subjects, spoke of the 'evils' of *arangetrams*, describing how they had become an end in themselves, distracting both the children and their parents from the main aim of learning the culture (interview 4.10.03). He knows of families who have had to re-mortgage their houses to pay for such an event, and of one *arangetram* that cost £27,000. One Bharatanatyam teacher at a Tamil temple in a poorer London suburb told me that she did not encourage her students to prepare for *arangetrams* unless they really wanted to do it, as she is aware of the financial constraints on their parents. She is satisfied if they work for good grades in their Bharatanayam exams and remain interested and committed to their practice.

There is too a new growth in the teaching of Bharatanatyam dance and of dance performances in the Tamil temples indicating a greater concern for the transmission of traditional culture to the young people. This is also indicative of the greater establishment and growing confidence of the community that enables extra time and energy to be given to cultural practices. One Tamil professional dancer and teacher told me how the evidence of dance classes in the temples was a UK phenomenon, as in India there were more independent dance schools which catered to the need for dance classes (interview 12.3.03). It too reveals the different role that the UK temples have assumed – one of providing community care (spiritual, moral, cultural and even medical) – as well as traditional ritual worship. The UK temples provide facilities for hosting small *puja* ceremonies for families which would normally take place in the home in India or Sri Lanka. The Ghanapathy Temple in Wimbledon now have a ceremony once a month at the full moon where the deity is taken out of the temple; this ritual has increased from an annual occasion due to the number of devotees who wish to participate by carrying the deity.

5.5 Dance located in London Tamil temples

Of the seven London Hindu temples visited for this research (and five discussed in detail), three at present offer regular dance classes – the Shree Ghanapathy Temple in Wimbledon, the London Sri Murugan Temple in East Ham and the new Sri Thiruthanigai Murugan Temple in Surbiton.²¹ Dance classes were taught at the London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple in East Ham, but have now moved to a local church hall. The dancers from this school still perform at the temple on festival occasions, and these events are examined below. The Sri Muthumari Amman Temple in Tooting, south London ran Bharatanatyam dance classes but these stopped a few years ago because of organisational difficulties. On January 1st 2004, however, a Bharatanatyam dance performance was given by students of the Harrow Tamil Sunday School, for celebrations for New Year's Day (January 1st). The school's dance teacher described to me how she had expected it to take place in the downstairs hall. She was not aware of the performance stage, in the temple, facing the deities, as it was usually covered by a curtain and never used for dance performances. In fact, at that event, as the main evening *puja* finished, the devotees simply turned their sitting positions around to watch the dance performance on the stage. It was beautifully decorated and lit, and although small, provided an entirely appropriate performing space for a devotional programme of Bharatanatyam dance (author's fieldnotes 1.1.04). All six temples discussed in detail have had performances of Bharatanatyam dance at festival times, although for the Sri Highgatehill Murugan temple, the festival of *Sivaratri*²² in March 2002 was the first time a dance performance had been held *in* the temple area.



Figure 16. Map of Greater London [Courtesy of M.Lubikowski of ML Design]

MERTON - Shree Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon (SW)

CAMDEN - Highgatehill Murugan Temple (N)

NEWHAM - London Sri Murugan Temple (NE)

NEWHAM - London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple (NE)

EALING - Sri Kanagathurkkai Amman Temple (W)

KINGSTON-UPON-THAMES - Sri Thiruthanigai Murugan Temple (SW)

WANDSWORTH - Sri Muthumari Amman (SW)

5.5:1 Shree Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon

This is a temple dedicated to Saivite worship, whose main deity is Ganesha or Ganapati, as he is often named, one of Lord Siva's sons. He is depicted with the head of an elephant, denoting wisdom, and is famed for his strength in removing obstacles from a

devotee's path. Hence he is worshipped often at the undertaking of a new project, a new business deal or a new life.

At this temple in Wimbledon, south London, Bharatanatyam dance is offered as a subject of study to the young girls whose families attend the temple. It is one of many subjects available at the temple, which include written and spoken Tamil, Hinduism, yoga, vocal music, and training in playing classical Indian instruments such as the violin, *veena*, *tabla*, *mrdangam*, flute and sitar. At the time of writing in 2004, the dance classes were held on Wednesday evenings between 6.00pm and 8.00pm, and on Sunday mornings between 9.00am and 12.00 in the adjoining hall to the temple, taught by two different teachers. One teacher was from Sri Lanka and has been in the UK for nearly twenty years; she has taught Bharatanatyam here and in Sri Lanka, and has just had her ninth *arangetram* student. She has taught classes at the Wimbledon temple for ten years, and has approximately fifteen children between the ages of six and fifteen learning there. She also teaches privately at her home, and at a Tamil Saturday school in Croydon. The temple makes no charge to the teachers and payment is made directly from the parents to the teachers. The rate is set by the temple and kept deliberately low so that parents can afford it, yet some do not pay, or do not bring their children regularly. In 2004, the cost was four pounds per class for dance and seven pounds for private lessons. Extra rehearsals for performances are expected both by the temple and by the parents for no extra cost. At the Tamil Saturday School, the dance teacher's rate of pay is fifteen pounds per hour per class even though some classes might have between 10-15 students.

All the girls at the Wimbledon temple are encouraged to take dance exams, and will spend part of each lesson working on their syllabus, and on preparation for dance items for festival celebrations at the temple. They keep notebooks for writing down the dances and prayers. Even the very young ones (some under-fives with the other

Figure 17. Young dance students performing *Kavadi* dance during *Navratri* at Shree Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon, October 2002.

Bharatanatyam teacher) performed a short item at the *Navratri* festival in October 2003. The exam system followed is from the *Oriental Fine Arts Academy*, set up twelve years ago as a charity by musician and teacher Ambika Tharmotharam, and adapted to suit the needs of students in the UK.²³ Each student studies Grades 1-6, exams are taken in April/May of each year, and each grade contains both theory and practical. The accompanying books which the students take home and use for practice, are in Tamil and English and the theory paper of the exams can be taken in either language. Tharmotharam estimates that in 2002, 1,300 students took these exams in London alone (Gorringe 2003:13), and examinations in this system are also taken by Tamil dance students in Norway, Germany, France, Holland, Switzerland.

The classes at the Wimbledon temple take place in a hall adjoining the temple, in a small area that is cordoned off by a curtain. It is not only noisy, but is also the thoroughfare to

the toilets, so there is constant disturbance. An old carpet is put on the ground where the students dance. In 2005, a new second floor of the temple has been built, giving additional classroom space for music and dance.

Figure 18a. Bharatanatyam dance class at Shree Ghanapathy Temple.

Figure 18b. Bharatanatyam dance class at Shree Ghanapathy Temple.

Geetha Maheswaran, a Sri Lankan whose father founded the Wimbledon temple in the late 1970s, has trained in Bharatanatyam and took her *arangetram* when younger. She now organises the children's events and all the cultural programmes at the temple. Maheswaran spoke of the significance of music and dance to their religious practice. 'We believe you can come to God through music and dance' she told me. When asked what terminology she uses for the dance when introducing performances or discussing classes, she said 'Bharatanatyam, a classical Indian dance' (interview 16.1.03). For the nine-day festival of *Navratri*, the teachers and their students are asked by Maheswaran to perform for thirty to forty minutes on one of the evenings as part of a daily evening programme of cultural performance. The programmes begin about 6.00pm (earlier at weekends) and go on till 8.00pm when the evening *puja* begins; they take place in the temple itself, where there is a small stage. Up to 100 people will attend each night.

The festival in October 2003 offered four evenings that included Bharatanatyam dance along with other musical items. They ranged between a short dance offering from the under-fives to an adult who trained at the temple and performed her *arangetram* several

years ago. She is now a qualified doctor, training to be a paediatric radiologist, but who continues to dances. Another evening, unusually, was a *Samarparnam*, danced by a ten-year old Tamil girl who had just performed her *arangetram* four days before. The *Samarparnam* is the first offering of dance back to the temple (and the deities) after an *arangetram*. This particular one was performed facing the Ghanapathy deity, in a large space inside the temple fully lit by moveable spotlights. She danced for approximately 50 minutes, and the performance was followed immediately by the daily 8.00pm *puja* in the temple. During the *puja*, she and her family and dance teacher were blessed by the priests. There was no doubt about the devotional atmosphere and power of the setting as she danced. The closeness of the audience to the young performer as they sat cross-legged on the ground, the presence of the deities surrounding the space and the perfumes and sounds of the temple *puja* created a collective devotional intensity, expressed through the audience's focussed attention and rapt facial expressions. When I spoke to the young dancer at the end, she described how she had enjoyed in particular performing the final item, a devotional *bhajan*, which had been full of meaning for her.

Figure 19. *Samaparnam* performance by ten year-old Sangeetha Balasingam at Shree Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon, during *Navratri*, October 2003.

When questioned about performances *in* the actual temple, Maheswaran spoke of the children enjoying performing for the main deity, Ghanapathy. The small stage can be placed in their temple facing the main shrine so performers will see both audience and deity. Maheswaran's pragmatic approach is that the performance spaces in the hall and temple are interchangeable and that some teachers prefer to use the hall as the acoustics are better, and less problematic if girls have their periods. I have watched performances

in both areas. One evening when dance was scheduled to be part of the programme *in* the temple, it was cancelled as the girl was menstruating²⁴.

5.5:2 Highgatehill Sri Murugan Temple, Highgate

The Highgatehill Sri Murugan Temple has not in the past held dance performances within the temple vicinity. Performances have taken place solely in the community hall, although classical music concerts have been a regular feature within the actual temple. These have been organised by a teacher of classical music at London's Bhavan Centre, who is adamant about the need for the temple to encourage and support cultural performances. She has organised many performances of music and dance in several of the Tamil temples. In March 2002, a Bharatanatyam dancer was invited to dance at the annual *Mahasivaratri* Festival at this Highgatehill Temple, and she performed in the temple sacred space, before the shrine of Siva. She commented to me afterwards:

This was the first time I had danced in a temple on *Sivaratri*. At the temple, I felt particularly privileged as they had never allowed dance there before. And to be asked to dance by the shrine was also very significant. The fact of dancing in a temple was itself significant....

Personal communication 28.3.02

Figure 20. Music performance for devotees at *Mahasivaratri* at Highgatehill Murugan Temple, March 2002.

Figure 21. Vena Ramphal performing a Siva dance in front of the Siva shrine during *Mahasivaratri* at Highgatehill Murugan Temple, March 2002.

This performance took place after the main *puja* in the temple which finished about 11.15pm. The *puja* was followed by group of young musicians and singers who performed classical Karnatic music and devotional *bhajans* for about 30 minutes, with the audience sitting facing them on the floor. The time was just before midnight. Then the audience simply turned around on the floor to face the Siva shrine, and after a short announcement in Tamil stating the dancer's name and the pieces she was to perform, the dance began. There was no stage, nor special lighting; the backdrop was the deity, lit, garlanded, dressed in silk and gold ornaments and creating a shining, colourful presence. Already the atmosphere was intense after several hours of devotional worship; the large temple warm and full of a variety of perfumes of incense, flowers, fruits and burning lamps. As the performer danced her two items dedicated to Lord Siva, there was a quiet concentration throughout the appreciative audience. This in turn seemed to spread around the temple, so that the other activities came to a stop and the priests, who were busying themselves with the other shrines and clearing of the *puja*, also stopped to watch the performance intently. The dancer performed partly to the audience and partly facing

the shrine enabling the audience to be drawn in to an intimacy created by the dancer's devotion. She later spoke of how:

the dance was for Siva; it is Siva. I did not treat it as a performance, at all. It was not a performance for an audience. It is very special for me to dance on *Sivaratri*.

Personal communication 28.3.02

5.5:3 London Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham

This temple also follows Saivite worship, and is dedicated to Murugan, a warrior and second son of Siva. Murugan is his Tamil name; in other parts of India he is known as Skanda. Every Sunday at the Murugan Temple, lessons in Bharatanatyam are offered along with classes in *veena*, violin, *mrdangam*, *karnatic* vocal and Tamil. The dance teacher Pathmini Gunaseelan, a Sri Lankan, has been teaching there for sixteen years, having trained in India and taught in Sri Lanka before coming to the UK in 1986. She also teaches at Walthamstow Tamil School on Saturdays, and has some private pupils at home. The rate for the lessons at the temple is £40 for a four month term, giving a weekly charge of approximately £2.50 per lesson, with a slightly higher cost for the more senior grades. Gunaseelan uses the *Academy of Fine Arts* examination system, developed in 1990 in India and Sri Lanka, and also used in New Zealand, Denmark and Norway.²⁵ Students living in Germany come to the UK to take their exams. It incorporates Grades 1-7 in both dance and music and the children take one grade each year in April. There is a small charge for costs (hire of hall, examiners' expenses, etc.) of £15 for the first grades rising to £20 for the final grades. The director of the Academy is Dr Niththyananthan, also the director of the London Tamil Centre, and headmaster of Wembley Tamil School. Gunaseelan is the Dance Director and examiner for the dance exams, and Saraswathy Pakiarajah is the Musical Director.

The classes start on Sunday mornings at 9.00am; the senior groups have one hour lessons and the younger ones three-quarters of an hour. At present (2003-4), the temple committee has rented an old public house which provides space for the temple, offices and a small hall. Their previous premises have been demolished to provide a site to build a new south Indian temple, and so the dance classes were being held in rather dilapidated temporary accommodation next door to the public house. The space for the dance classes

was small and the room cold and damp, hardly ideal for strenuous dance practice. Since mid-2004, this temporary accommodation has been demolished too, and now rooms in a local school are rented for the music and dance lessons. This will continue until after the opening of the new temple in May 2005. The eldest girls are sixteen and seventeen, the youngest four and a half - all girls except one boy aged seven. Lessons are of a high standard, the discipline strict and the children work hard during their allotted time, beginning and ending the class with a *namaskar*, and touching the *tattu-kali* (teacher's block and stick for beating the rhythm) at the end as a blessing and sign of respect. The teaching is mainly conducted in Tamil, with a little English and the time is spent working on *padams* (lyrical Bharatanatyam items based on poems) for the grade 6 exam for the advanced students, and on learning the simple *adavus* (basic dance steps) for the newer and younger children. For the first two weeks of the September term, the lessons are dedicated solely to practice for their forthcoming performances at *Navratri*. [See accompanying DVD Track 4 for film extracts of Bharatanatyam performance in the Murugan temple.]

Figure 22a. Youngest students learning Bharatanatyam at Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham.

Figure 22b. Senior students aged 14-16 during their Bharatanatyam class, Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham.

During the *Navratri* festival in 2003, I watched dance performances at the Mahalakshmi Temple and Murugan Temple, both in East Ham, held as part of their evening cultural programmes. At the Murugan temple, the senior students learning Bharatanatyam gave a programme of dance as part of the *Navratri* festivities. The temple was full of devotees for the evening *puja* as it was a Friday evening, the main evening for weekly worship, and also for *Navratri*. The dancers were asked to come at 8.30pm, as we were, but in fact the *puja* did not finish until 8.50. Before the performance started, the temple president addressed the audience (in Tamil) for twenty minutes, followed by the senior priest who spoke, also in Tamil about the performance and the dancers. Finally, about 9.25pm the dance commenced. As the temple was still busy, the performance took place in an adjacent hall with a tiny stage. The audience consisted of the girls' parents and other devotees, making a total number of about seventy people. Although it was a hall, a small shrine was been set up close to the stage by the priest on which were several of the smaller (and portable) deities. At the end of the performance, the girls and their parents went into the temple and were blessed and given *prasad* by the senior priest. This evening was one of three cultural programmes during *Navratri* when dance performances were offered to the devotees.

Figure 23. Senior Bharatanatyam students performing during *Navratril* at Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham, October 2003.

Figure 24. Bharatanatyam dancer being blessed and given *prasad* by senior prlest Sri Naganatha Sivam Gurukkal after *Navratril* performance at Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham, October 2003.

5.5:4 London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, East Ham

At this temple, a short distance from the Murugan temple in East Ham, the presiding deity is Lakshmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu; Mahalakshmi literally means the ‘great *Lakshmi*’. At this temple a performance of Bharatanatyam for *Navratri* by local dance students was scheduled and we were invited to attend. The space inside the temple was small, and the devotees were crowded on the floor facing the main deity to watch. The evening *puja* had just taken place, so the temple was warm, brightly lit, highly decorated and abundant with smells of incense, flowers, and cut fruit. Just after 8.00pm the dance performance started, with the performers dancing in a very restricted space in front of the main deity which was on full view, with the curtain open. The young people dancing were all dance students of a well-known and highly regarded local dance school, *Mudralaya*, which began its classes seventeen years ago in this temple.²⁶ Classes were taught there for two years until more space was needed and then the local church hall hired. After an hour of solo Bharatanatyam items, beautifully presented and danced, the dancers were blessed by the priest and they and all the devotees took *arati*. The five dancers were aged between ten and twenty-three, and included one boy of fifteen. Although they introduced their items in English, the general temple announcements were made in Tamil and I was informed that the temple hosts a mixed community of both Sri Lankan Tamils and Tamils from south India. Programmes of dance are regularly offered for Hindu festivals such as *Navratri*, *Sivaratri* and the Tamil, Malayalam²⁷ and Telugu New Year and are performed by both students and professional dancers.

[See accompanying DVD Track 4 for film extracts of Bharatanatyam performance at *Navaratri* in the Mahalakshmi temple.]

Figure 25. Bharatanatyam performance during *Navratri* at Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, East Ham, October 2004.

5.5:5 Sri Kanagathurkkai Amman Temple, Ealing

Ethnographic research at these temples has revealed other forms of dance taking place in addition to the teaching and performing of Bharatanatyam. During the summer chariot festival at this Amman Temple, and the Wimbledon Ghanapathy Temple, some of the men devotees performed the *kavadi* dance²⁸. The dancers performed as the deity was carried out of the temple and placed on the chariot, and, as it processed around the local streets, the men continued to dance in front of its path with the musicians. Hundreds of people lined the streets. The men carried the *kavadi* on their shoulders – large, heavy wooden frames decorated with peacock feathers and flowers, and with metal bowls of milk hanging from the frames. The coloured structure symbolises the legendary mountain of sins that the God carries on his shoulders on behalf of mankind, and milk is carried as an offering to the deity, purified by the men’s devotion through their dance.

These men moved to the sound of the temple musicians playing the traditional instruments of *nagaswaram*, a double-reeded flute (like an oboe), the *tavil*, a large, outdoor drum beaten with a curved stick one side and the drummer's hand with metal covers on the fingers on the other, and the Indian cymbals (*talam*)²⁹. It was an extraordinary and powerful sight to witness. Already at 8.30am the temple was packed full of people; it was warm and the sound of the two drummers, cymbals and two reed instruments extremely loud. The air was heavy with the scents of incense, flowers, fire burning and of cut fruit, and the intense colours of the decorated deities, the flowers and the women's silk *saris* seemed to intoxicate the viewer's senses. The sounds of the rhythmic music competed with the ringing of the bell and the chants of the priests as they continued their oblations to the deities, and the devotees, after two to three hours of such ritual *puja*, were in a contented, devotional and emotionally unified state.

The men began their dance, inwardly focussed and oblivious to their immediate surroundings. As they moved and turned around following the beat of the drum, jumping, hopping and stepping to the rhythm, they knocked against some of the devotees or occasionally lost their footing as the floor became slippery with spilt milk. Their movements grew more rapid and intense as the sound and the beat of the music increased. [See accompanying DVD Track 5 for film extracts of possession dances at this temple during the chariot festival.] At the Ealing Temple, but not at the Wimbledon one,³⁰ body piercing is part of the men's devotional ritual to the deity. Through their cheeks (and sometimes through the tongue) they have a small metal spear, a *vel*, symbolising the spear that Lord *Murugan* carries, and that represents his *shakti* power, inherited from his mother. Through the top skin on their upper arms they have long, thin needles and in their backs, hooks that are attached to ropes and held by another man who guides the dancer from behind, carefully pulling and lifting the ropes as he moves. Body piercing of this type is called 'wearing *alaku*'.

The term *alaku* denotes the various metal hooks, spikes, spears, skewers and needles used to pierce and wound the human body – always solely the male body – in order to express submission, obedience, repentance and devotion to a deity. A man 'puts *alaku*' either in order to fulfil a vow made in the past or to win divine favour for a boon which the devotee hopes will be granted in the future.

Kapadia 2000:184

It is believed that a state of ritual purity is a precondition for possession, or entering a trance-like state, and these men will have fasted, bathed and carried out various *puja* before undertaking the *kavadi*. A subsequent chapter examines the complexities of the phenomenon of possession and its related key issues of purity and pollution.

5.6 History and development of five London Tamil temples

Out of the seventeen (approximately) Hindu Tamil temples in London and Greater London,³¹ five in particular have been selected to be part of this research in detail, and two more have been visited less frequently. Time constraints have not allowed a detailed examination of all seventeen temples, so those featuring dance practices and classes were chosen. Of the five studied in detail, all follow a Saivite³² tradition of worship of the deity Siva or one of his 'family' – Ghanapathy (known also as Ganesha, Vinayaka and Pillaiyar) and Murugan (whose other names include Skanda, Kartikeya, and Subrahmanya), his sons - or the goddess Amman, in one of her many forms.³³ The worship of the mother goddess (Amman) is central to Tamil devotion, and expresses the Tamil ideology of love, described as “‘mother’ (*amma*), the one word in the Tamil language more imbued than any other with sentiments of love’ (Trawick 1992:113). One of the temples, the London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, supports both Saivite and Vaishnava worship, containing shrines to Lakshmi-Narayana³⁴ (Vaishnava tradition) and Meenakshi and Sundareswar (Saivite tradition).³⁵ This is a more unusual phenomenon, and appears particular to the UK situation, where the ecumenical nature of many diaspora temples brings different cults into one space. There are a few examples of south Indian temples in India with shrines for worship of both traditions (Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu contains a modest Vaishnava shrine as well as its main Siva shrine), but it is atypical.³⁶

Taylor argues that the establishing of patterns of worship and temples in which to worship has proved to be a major factor in unifying the Sri Lankan Tamils in Britain and in securing their distinctiveness as an ethnic community. The financial commitment and involvement needed ‘gave Tamils a goal to aim for during which time they became aware of themselves as a significant group who could work together’ (Taylor 1991:207). This is despite the fact that many Tamils will perform domestic rituals at home, and a much

smaller percentage will attend the temple regularly in addition to their domestic worship. Some will only visit for festival occasions and some not at all. Each of the histories of the individual temples follows a similar pattern, revealing parallel elements in the struggle of the community to obtain suitable premises once their prayer groups, which started in devotees' own homes and then in hired halls, began to grow substantially.³⁷ Huge financial sacrifices were necessary as founder members invested their life savings in order to purchase properties, making essential commitments both in time and expertise in order for these undertakings to succeed. The results of the hard work and financial generosity can now be seen in the success of the temples as they function today, playing host, especially during Hindu festivals, to several hundreds of worshippers. The summer chariot festival at the Ealing Amman temple attracts over 6,000 visitors as does the same festival at the Wimbledon Ghanapathy temple. In Wimbledon, the local mayor and other dignitaries, local councillors, members of local inter-faith groups as well as Hindu devotees from all over London and the suburbs attend the annual festivals. The temple organisers are rightly proud of their successful and fruitful community relationships.

5.6:1 Shree Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon

Mr Ratnasingham, a Vellalar, left Sri Lanka in 1964 and emigrated to the UK with his wife and very few possessions. He had been a successful lecturer in electrical and mechanical engineering in Sri Lanka and fortunately was able to find work with several large engineering firms in the UK. After several years he set up his own building company which became highly profitable. For some time he held regular religious services in his own home for other Sri Lankan Tamils, also becoming a founder member and Life Trustee of the Highgate Murugan Temple. Difficulties arose with the Trustees of the Murugan Temple, so Ratnasingham re-mortgaged his house and managed to purchase an old Salvation Army Hall and Chapel in 1980 near where he lived in Wimbledon. Alterations were carried out to the chapel to accommodate a temple, and the

	Name of temple and date of consecration	Area in London	Main deity	Predominately South Indian or Sri Lankan	Tradition of Worship	Bharatanatyam dance lessons	Bharatanatyam dance performances
1.	Shree Ghanapathy 1981	Wimbledon	Ghanapathy	Sri Lankan	Saivite	Yes	Yes
2.	Highgatehill Murugan 1986	Archway	Murugan	Sri Lankan	Saivite	No	Yes
3.	London Sri Murugan 1989, 2005	East Ham	Murugan	South Indian	Saivite	Yes	Yes
4.	London Sri Mahalakshmi 1990	East Ham	Lakshmi-Narayan	South Indian	Saivite/Vaishnavite	No	Yes
5.	Sri Kanagathurkkai Amman 1999	Ealing	Amman	Sri Lankan	Saivite/Shakti	No	Yes
6.	Sri Muthumari Amman 1996	Tooting	Amman	Sri Lankan	Saivite/Shakti	No, at present; yes, in past	Yes
7.	Sri Thiruthanigai Murugan 2003?	Surbiton	Murugan	Sri Lankan	Saivite	Yes	Yes

Figure 26. Chart of London Tamil Temples visited by author.

adjoining hall converted to a prayer *mandir* which opened in January 1981. The main temple was consecrated in September of the same year and it soon became a thriving centre for Hindu religious, cultural and social activities. The temple has always been a family-run affair, with Ratnasingham's wife supervising the day-to-day activities, his son overseeing the administration and finance, and his daughter, Geetha looking after the children's activities and cultural programmes. No trustees or a committee have ever been established. With Ratnasingham's sudden death five years ago, there is now a move to set up a family trust as the official temple authority.



Figure 27. Shree Ghanapthy Temple, Wimbledon.

The adjoining prayer hall is dedicated to a popular living Indian guru, Sai Baba, and many of the Tamils who attend the temple are also followers of Sai Baba. The Sai Baba movement in the UK began in 1966, and the Sri Lankan Tamils make up a significant

part of the movement's membership (Taylor 1994: 212). There are over fifty centres in the UK, one of which is at the Wimbledon temple and here classes are offered on Sundays to the children (Sai Spiritual Education classes) run by volunteer teachers covering Hinduism and other major religions as well as guidance in moral and spiritual values.³⁸ The Sai Baba devotees perform many voluntary activities for the local community, including cooking approximately 250 meals for the homeless every Sunday morning, helping with the local borough's Meals on Wheels services, looking after the gardens of the local Police station, delivery of twice-yearly hampers for elderly people through Merton's Homecare Services and distribution of books and toys to underprivileged children. Schools, colleges and inter-faith groups are welcomed on visits to the temple, and devotees of the temple are active on local and national inter-faith committees. Ratnasingham also formed a federation of London (and Greater London) Tamil Hindu temples where representatives of each of five Tamil temples meet regularly to discuss the religious calendar³⁹ and to share experiences. Problems had arisen over clashes of festival days and there had been difficulties with some priests in one or two of the temples. All these areas are discussed regularly and now an annual conference has been established at which speakers from outside the UK are invited to debate current issues in Hinduism. The five temples that are at present participating in the federation are Wimbledon, Archway, Ealing, Lewisham (south-east London), and Stoneleigh (near Cheam, south-west of London).



Figure 28. Shree Ghanapthy Temple, showing structure of old Salvation Army chapel.

5.6:2 Highgatehill Sri Murugan Temple, Archway⁴⁰

The Vellalar founder of this temple, Mr Sabapathipillai, emigrated from Sri Lanka in 1965 where he had worked as a lawyer. With colleagues he set up in 1966 the Hindu Association of Great Britain with the aim of raising funds to build a Saivite temple in London and to promote Tamil Hinduism. Regular religious services were being held in his home, but soon numbers grew too large, and a local hall had to be hired. By 1974 a new trust was established, called the Britannia Hindu (Saiva) Temple Trust, primarily to focus on the establishing of a temple. He became chairman of a board of trustees, but difficulties and disputes arose over the number and types of deities for the temple, over who would be included or excluded from worshipping there and other contentious issues. Finally, a relatively cheap site was found on the Archway Road – a building that had been a Baptist Church, then a synagogue and now had had its roof destroyed by fire. Plans to rebuild the roof in the highly decorated south Indian style with a main structure and gateway were stopped by Haringey Council, so new plans were drawn up to build

inside the roof of the original building. In 1977 work began, but at a slow pace and it was not till the 1980s that the temple was partially in use. By 1986 it was fully consecrated, becoming a thriving centre for Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu worship. This temple was chosen to welcome the Queen and Prince Philip as part of their Golden Jubilee tour in 2002, and was the first royal visit to a Tamil Hindu temple in the UK.⁴¹ One reason given for its selection was because 'it resembles the growing number of Hindu places of worship across Britain, in that it is relatively small and is adapted from an existing building' (Evening Standard 23.5.02). Tamils from Mauritius and Malaysia as well as Sri Lanka use the temple at Archway; the Mauritians however, have their own festival times and their own priest, so their worship follows a pattern parallel to the Sri Lankans rather than collectively with them.

The founder of the temple wished to maintain a strictly Saivite tradition at the Highgatehill Temple and excluded south Indian Tamils who were Vaishnavites. But since the temple as a charitable foundation is subject to British charity laws, it has to be open to all comers, including any Vaishnavites who wish to attend and any castes who are usually excluded such as the *dalits* or untouchables. There has also been a political dimension in the temple's allegiances from its inception as the founder had 'stated that the Archway Temple was sympathetic to the moral cause of a separate state in Sri Lanka' (Taylor 1994:203). The political organisation of LTTE (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, an organisation identified with militancy, violence and war) based in Britain held its annual *puja* at the Highgate Temple for many years.⁴²



Figure 29. Highgatehill Sri Murugan Temple, Highgate, London.

5.6:3 London Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham

The Murugan temple in East Ham has been undergoing extensive rebuilding before the opening of what was the first traditionally built south Indian Hindu temple in London in May 2005. Details of the temple's origins were discussed in an interview with one of the founder members of this temple, Mrs Sivajoti and Mr Sampathkumar, the president. Mrs Sivajoti, aged seventy-eight and who came to the UK from Sri Lanka in 1966, is one of the trustees of the temple and Head of Cultural Education. She was part of a small group of devotees who met once a month in 1975 in a private house for *puja*, conducted by one of the Brahmin members of the group. In a pattern similar to other temples, larger premises were needed as more people joined their group. For a while the need was met by hiring rooms at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's (Institute of Indian Culture) original

Lankans. The rest of the priests are from south India. As described above, performances of dance do take place as part of religious festival celebrations, and sometimes for the Friday evening worship, but they are always held in the adjacent hall as the temple space is small.



Figure 30. Old site of London Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham



Figure 31. Interior of new London Sri Murugan Temple (unfinished, April 2005)

5.6:4 London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, East Ham

Dr Alagrajah, a local G.P. who is from Andhra Pradesh, founded this temple in 1985. He was initially the president of the London Sri Murugan Temple in East Ham between 1982-84. His devotion to the deity Mahalakshmi, added to the fact that there was no UK Tamil temple dedicated to this particular deity or tradition of south Indian Vaishnavite worship here, convinced him to form a new trust, the *Lakshmi Narayana Trust* which he set up as a Hindu religious charity. Using his own finances, he purchased an empty clothes shop on the corner of the main High Street in East Ham for £160,000 and initiated a building project to transform the building into a traditional south Indian temple, including ‘faux bas-relief’ pillars on the outside walls (see photo below). The main deities were installed and the temple consecrated in 1990, and since then further deities

have been added. Before the transformation into a traditional temple, the devotees met and worshipped in front of pictures of Vaishnavite deities, and continued this for three years. Then in 1988, they were able to purchase their first stone deity from India, and in 1989 to commence the building of the new temple inside the shell of the original building.



Figure 32. Current site of London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, East Ham

The temple now has eight working priests, four Saivite and four Vaishnavite. The devotees are a mixture of Tamil and Telugu backgrounds, from Sri Lanka and different parts of south India (Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh). Dr Alagrajah has remained the president and administers the trust with the help of a board of twenty other trustees. When asked if any of the eight working priests was from Sri Lanka, one of the senior trustees stressed to me that it was a south Indian, not Sri Lankan temple. As the current temple premises are extremely small and the building somewhat dilapidated, a decision has been made to raise money to build a new temple. A new property, two hundred yards away on the main road has been purchased and planning

permission sought. The land and property (an old public house) has cost £1.7 million and estimated costs for the new and ambitious building are estimated to be £6 million. The new basement will house kitchens and a dining area for up to 400 people; the ground floor will house the temple which will accommodate three major and eight smaller shrines and will be built according to traditional practice; and the top two floors will provide a cultural, social and medical centre for the devotees and an auditorium for music and dance performances (with stage and seating). Lifts, facilities for the disabled, air-conditioning, central heating and audio-visual systems will all be incorporated. An adjoining building will be converted to provide accommodation for the priests and visiting officials. Completion is planned for 2006. This will provide the second traditional purpose-built south Indian temple in London, and the third in the UK. This temple too, follows a south Indian calendar.



Figure 33. New site purchased for demolition and for rebuilding of Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, East Ham (opposite side of road to current site).

5.6:5 Sri Kanagathurkkai Amman Temple, Ealing

Mr A. Thevasagayam, the Secretary of the Board of Trustees and one of the founder members of the Ealing Amman temple explained to me the story of how just over ten years ago, the seeds of this thriving community and temple were sown. He had arrived in the UK from Sri Lanka in 1974 in order to study. He and several of the key members of the temple were regular devotees at the Archway temple, but questions were raised with the priests as to why there was no Amman temple in London, despite there already being temples devoted to the other main deities. Thurkkai Amman, or Mother Thurkka (Durga), is the form of the divine *shakti* power as mother, and in particular, in her powerful manifestation that fights the evil and malevolent forces, and who protects and sustains her devotees. The deity is called Kanaga, meaning 'golden', indicating that she appears here in her benign form, with her trident in her left hand (not the active right one) and the right hand displaying the gesture 'fear-not' (Waghorne 2004.220).

So a group of Amman devotees began to meet regularly to sing *bhajans* and to pray to Thurkkai Amman in a community centre in Harrow, north London in 1991. Many Hindus living in Harrow and in Alperton came, and it became necessary to move to a rented hall in Southall, Middlesex, and to hold another weekly meeting on Tuesdays in Wembley. Mr Ratnasingham (founder of the Wimbledon temple) donated a small Amman deity that he had purchased in India especially for this group and an important *puja* was held for the goddess in January 1993. Up till that point the worship had been conducted with only framed photos of the deities.

By 1993 the community had managed to raise £71,000 and began to look for a suitable site for purchase for a temple. An Executive Committee was formed and various locations surveyed. The present site and building, an old and dilapidated Baptist chapel in Ealing was on the market for £500,000 but this was far beyond their budget. They continued to search for alternative premises. Then in 1995 the same building and land was put up for auction and they were able to purchase it for £270,000. Everyone was encouraged to try to raise £5,000 each in whatever way they could. Prominent members

of the Tamil community in the UK were assiduously approached and over 500 people agreed to become life members of the temple, each paying £501 for the privilege. Sculptors were brought in from India and the work planned out in four major stages. Building was completed finally in June 1999, and the committee organised a celebratory *Maha Kumbhabhishekam* - a special consecration of the temple and the deities lasting for forty-one days - that attracted over 4,000 devotees from the UK and other parts of the world.



Figure 34. Sri Kanagathurkkai Amman Temple, Ealing

The temple now has six working Tamil Sri Lankan priests, offers classes on Sundays to the young people in Hinduism and Tamil, and will include dance and music performances as part of their cultural programme during *Navratri*. When asked why these subjects are not offered in classes on Sundays, Thevasagayam explained that there are many Tamil

weekend schools in the local area, all teaching music and dance. At present there is no need for more classes in the temple, but they would be willing to respond if there was. The local Tamil schools are invited to send their students to perform at festival times, and they will either give their concerts in the adjoining 'wedding' hall, or if there is space, in the temple (personal communication 21.10.03). The community is predominately Sri Lankan Tamil, but they do also have devotees from south India and Malaysia. A huge thrust of the energy and finance of the community goes towards charity work in Sri Lanka, where support is given to build orphanages, to sponsor children in need, and to support children's medical treatment; a separate charity has now been established for this.

5.7 Other voices: dance professionals and dance students

One professional male dancer who has regularly taught Bharatanatyam dance at two Tamil temples and now runs his own dance school has arranged regular programmes of dance at festival times in the temples. Both he and his students have performed at these events. In 2002 during *Sivaratri* he gave a presentation in the Sri Mahalakshmi Temple in front of about 150 devotees, accompanied by the temple musicians, where he performed a dance about a devotee and the Sivalinga. He described how he finds the temple a more informal and more intimate setting than a proscenium stage, and would always choose specific devotional items for the temple setting (personal communication 20.8.03). One of his male students, now a professional Bharatanatyam dancer had danced many times at the Mahalakshmi temple and the Murugan temple in East Ham for Hindu festival occasions such as *Navratri*, *Sivaratri*, and the Tamil and Telugu New Years⁴⁴, but now has misgivings about performing there. 'You are put under pressure to perform as devotion, as a service to the temple, free' he told me, but now believed it simply provided a performance for the devotees at no cost to the temple. 'You are not really doing it for the deities, because your back is to them, and that doesn't feel right', he added (personal communication 21.8.03). As a professional dancer, on these occasions he is torn between his sense of devotion and his need to earn a living through dance. Last year, he created special items to perform for the Telugu New Year with the temple musicians, so extra time and rehearsal was needed. Unusually, at this performance, the president of the temple gave him a small donation.

An *Odissi* dancer who frequently performs in Britain, Europe and India talked to me about her devotion to the dance and her enjoyment in performing in temples. In her understanding her performance is her devotion to God whether it is a secular staged location or a temple, but she finds the latter more compelling. In Britain she has danced in ISKCON temples and in two London temples, and always tries to dance so her back is not facing the deities. Although there is no payment from the temples, some have offered travel expenses and some have collected donations from the audience. In India she has danced at various temple dance festivals,⁴⁵ a newly ‘invented tradition’ established in the late 1980s and 1990s by impresarios ‘promoting them as a return of the religious function of the dance’ (O’Shea 2001:190). Large audiences are attracted who sit in an open-air area outside of the temple where a stage is erected, and tickets are sold for the seats. Thus it is in fact similar to an ordinary secular staged performance, a concert art, held in the vicinity of the temple. The dancers are given, however, the chance to perform *puja* in the temple and to do their own devotional dance there, and this particular dancer spoke of it being an extraordinarily powerful experience to face and dance to the deity of Siva in the temple of Chidambaram.⁴⁶ Paul Younger (1995:160) notes too that the priest’s festival handbook at the Chidambaram Temple still contains indications of when dances were performed in the different festivals in the past by the *devadasis*.

These sentiments were also expressed by a professional Bharatanatyam dancer quoted in Chapter One:7, in describing the effect of dancing *inside* the Archway temple at *Sivaratri*. Although it was a profound experience for her to dance both closely to the shrine *and* facing it, she also explained afterwards ‘that while I fully recognise the *religious* significance of *Sivaratri*, it is the dance itself that is sacred for me; it is my ritual, if you like’ (personal communication 28.3.02). Both the stage and the temple are sacred spaces for her. She explained further the importance of dancing at *Sivaratri*:

This is because I see Siva as a metaphor/embodiment of dance. Dancing on *Sivaratri* is about remembering and being blessed by the sanctity of the art in a very real way. I see sanctity not as being a ‘religious’ quality, but going far beyond that. It’s important for me to dance on that day as it is a reminder of the magnitude of the art...I feel extraordinarily privileged and very humble at the same time.

Bharatanatyam dancer, personal communication, 28.3.02.

This dancer had also performed in a temple in Bangalore, in an open hall area directly in front of the shrine. She could not see the deity, but acknowledged the ‘specialness’ of dancing in the temple there. The experience was not more spiritual, because she finds that is always present wherever she dances, but she spoke of dancing there, as in the example above, as a privilege. She commented too that the audience was very attentive and responsive and that for them, it appeared to be a spiritual/religious experience. ‘I feel they saw the performance as a mode of worship as well as a classical performance’ she added (personal communication 27.11.01).

Eleven young female students of Bharatanatyam dance aged between 10 – 17 who learn at the Murugan temple in East Ham were given questionnaires relating to their dance lessons and their views on the meaning of the dance. They had all been trained solely by the teacher at the temple, and had been learning between 4-7 years. All had successfully taken Grades 1- 4 or 1- 5 of the Academy of Fine Arts Exams and had danced several times in the temple’s hall for *Navratri* programmes. The girls indicated that they loved performing. When questioned on their favourite dance style, most wrote ‘Bharatanatyam’ and explained that they enjoyed the music and that it helped them to understand their religion. I later put verbal questions to them about Bollywood dance, and in this conversation, they all admitted to enjoying Bollywood as a style of dance and to practising it regularly in school dance clubs. They spoke this in rather hushed voices so that their teacher could not hear. After this discussion and after checking with me that it was acceptable, some of the girls then felt confident to write in their questionnaires that Bollywood was in fact their favourite dance form. But it was obvious that they felt shy of speaking about it in the context and place of their Bharatanatyam lessons.

Most agreed that Bharatanatyam did express their Hindu religion as it tells of the stories of the mythological gods and that the dancer performs prayers to the gods. Sophie, aged 16, wrote that ‘Lord Nataraj is the God of dance and I feel I receive his blessing’, and Arani, also 16, simply stated, ‘It is the dance of Lord Siva’⁴⁷. Sophie articulated too how dance played a part in teaching both the student dancer ‘and the audience about the gods of the Hindu religion and prevents the religion and culture being forgotten – especially in

the west'. Sahaana (13) thought that dance 'is part of my faith as it has prayers to God, and it tells the story of our God, Lord Natarajah'.

They all enjoyed attending *Navratri* at the temple to dance, but additionally the meeting of friends and family there was important, as well as the watching of other cultural programmes. Meera, aged 12, wrote that fasting was her favourite aspect of *Navratri*, whilst Sahanna mentioned taking part in the *puja* held a special significance. For Priya (15), the blessing in the temple after performing the dance was particularly powerful. Although a useful tool, questionnaires for this age group do not always yield the best results, as it appears to need more detailed verbal discussion to draw out the more considered responses, and for the more difficult questions to be taken seriously. However, time and circumstances have not always allowed for fuller discussions. (see Appendix 4 for chart of results of these questionnaires).

5.8 Tamil identity through dance – a summary

The significant identity markers of the Tamil community of language and cultural practices, including dance have been considered particularly in relation to the UK Tamil population. It is evident that the learning of the classical dance form of Bharatanatyam by young Tamil girls and women is a way of demonstrating a return to one's roots and of ensuring a continuation of absorption of Tamil culture. As noted in the SADiB report 'In the UK and elsewhere, for example, most families who send their daughters to Bharata Natyam classes do it with the conviction of continuing an ancestral duty' (Grau 2002:57). It is a way of ensuring 'that one continues a glorious tradition in the modern world' (ibid:59).

Bharatanatyam is being promoted as an important subject for study in two of the Tamil temples, and as very relevant to religious festivals in all the temples visited through performances by teachers, professionals and students. It is also taught at most of the Tamil Saturday and Sunday schools. Its religiosity for devotees, teachers and students has been briefly examined here, and forms the basis for a more thorough investigation in the subsequent chapter. Nowadays, in its revival form, Bharatanatyam offers and

represents to the Indian émigré community middle-class respectability, highly-valued femininity, the absorption of traditional prayers and mythology and a spiritual/religious devotion to the deity. It is a perfect carrier of tradition from this point of view.

The text continues in Chapter Six with a further examination of the dance style of Bharatanatyam and its relationship with the temple as part of a further enquiry into perceptions of religiosity within the framework of dance practices. Significant issues emerging from the fieldwork, such as possession and trance dance during worship, and the place of Hindu concepts of purity and pollution in relation to dance and movement are interrogated and analysed.

Notes:

¹ Cited by Kersenboom (1995:27,39). This *varnam* was handed down to her by her teacher Nandini Ramini and certainly appeared in the early 1800s.

² See Rangacharya's translation of *Natyashastra* (1986:1). The four *Vedas* are a collection of ancient hymns, regarded as main body of the sacred scriptures of Hinduism. They are thought to have their source in divine revelation. The word *Veda* means knowledge, and is derived from the Sanskrit root form *vid*.

³ I am aware in referring to the Sanskrit *Natyashastra* in conjunction with the Tamil classical language of the dichotomous allegiances that both textural traditions represent. Rukmini Devi's reliance on the canonical Sanskrit texts to legitimate Bharatanatyam's glorious, ancient and national heritage was directly in opposition to Balasaraswati's emphasis on the Tamil legacy of this dance form. See O'Shea (1998, 2001) for a full exposition of this subject.

⁴ O'Shea makes the point based on her reading of Ramaswamy (1997) that for the 'religious Tamil devotees... Tamil is the favored language of the gods, while, for Balasarawati, it is not the language of deities but an ideal vehicle for expressing one's devotion to them.' (2001:148, note 72).

⁵ Not all Tamil diasporic communities attempt to maintain their ethnic identity through preservation of their language. Studies by Naji and David of the Malaysian Tamil community revealed that the middle and younger age groups 'appear to be shifting away most from their ethnic language' and using 'other markers of identity like wearing Indian clothes, celebrating Indian festivals...' (2003:101).

⁶ This was the Sinhala Only Bill, passed as a law in 1956, which changed the Sri Lankan official language from both Tamil and Sinhala to Sinhala only and made Sinhala the language of government, replacing English.

⁷ This famous song was written by Tamil poet Bharadya, a nationalist and freedom fighter, and praises the quality of 'Tamilness'.

⁸ See www.geocities.com/tamiltribune September 1999, and June 2001.

⁹ At a talk titled 'Saivism Today' given at the Wimbledon Ghanapathy temple by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylan Swami in March 2005, the *swami* spoke of the importance of Sanskrit for the recitation of prayers, calling it 'the established language for the gods' and explaining how Sanskrit was the perfect intermediary in temple worship.

¹⁰ See Goonasekera and Holaday (1998).

¹¹ The Sinhalese government introduced the 'university admissions policy' which standardised marks, effectively placing 'the Tamil students at a disadvantage in that they had to obtain a higher aggregate of marks to enter the universities – in the medical, science and engineering faculties – than the Sinhalese' (Silva 1999:22). Up to then the Tamils were in the dominant position in the science-based faculties of the then University of Ceylon.

¹² Vellalas – the highest Tamil caste in Sri Lanka, landowners.

¹³ Although it is a well-known fact that insiders often exaggerate their numbers, the estimated number of Sri Lankan Tamils in the UK is also given at 150,00-200,00 on Brent Council's website (www.brent.gov.uk/brain [accessed 26.8.2003]). As the 2001 government census did not distinguish Asian places of origin, there is no accurate record of the community's numbers. Sriskandarajah (2002:292) gives the total numbers of overseas Tamils as approximately 800,000 – 400,000 in Canada, 200,000 in Europe, 40,000 in the USA and 30,000 in Australia and the rest spread over several other countries.

¹⁴ See the Refugee Council's press release September 18 2003, published on their website: www.refugeecouncil.org/news/septo3/relea133.htm

¹⁵ It is important to note here that once I had been accepted into the Tamil temples, respondents' homes and Tamil Sunday schools, people were warm, generous and helpful.

¹⁶ It is interesting here to note the difference between the very publicity conscious Swaminarayan group and the Tamil community. The opening of the London Swaminarayan temple in Neasden, north London was shown on BBC TV news broadcasts and attracted many high-profile visitors. It continues to be the only Hindu temple that Londoners know about. The recent opening (May 2005) of the first south Indian traditional temple to be built in London, by the Tamils in East Ham was featured on Tamil TV and attended by the local mayor, but no further publicity was actively sought.

¹⁷ See scholars such as O'Shea (1998) and Allen (1997) and Chapter One, endnote 8. A succinct description of Bharatanatyam's history is given here: 'The dance form has its roots in the *dasi attam* performed by a special class of women attached to temples and royal courts until the "anti-nautch campaign" of the 1890s managed to all but submerge such practices. In the first half of the twentieth century, a series of historical circumstances, including nationalisation, a brahminization of the performing arts, and a dialogue between Western and Indian artists,

converged to bring bharatanatyam to the proscenium stage where its performance was now acceptable for upper-caste women' (Pillai 2002:14-15).

¹⁸ This text also refers to celebratory ritual dances and possession dances (O'Shea 2001:204n.32).

¹⁹ One young professional Bharatanatyam dancer interviewed spoke of his *arangetram* costing his parents £12,000 in 1998. He said 'I used to think *arangetrams* were very important and the thing to do, but now it just seems like lucrative business for the gurus' (personal communication 26.9.03). Another dancer told me that gurus in London were now being paid upwards of £5,000 for an *arangetram*.

²⁰ Gaston refers to this phenomenon in India too (1991:163) where Indian Christian students perform their *arangetrams* with reference to Jesus in their dance items and the on-stage icons.

I recently attended a Roman Catholic church in London during which a group of Bharatanatyam dancers on tour from India danced especially choreographed liturgical items as part of the mass (June 2004). The dancers were all students of *Kalai Kaviri College of Fine Arts*, in Tiruchirappalli, south India, a Catholic college for Tamils and were touring the UK for one month dancing in churches and cathedrals as part of the religious services.

²¹ In June 2005, this temple moved site from Surbiton to New Malden. I have been told also of dance classes taking place at the London Sivan Kovil temple in Lewisham, south-east London, another Tamil temple. This temple has an adjoining community hall with a stage where weddings, *arangetrams* and performances can take place.

²² *Sivaratri* (Siva's night; also called *Mahasivaratri* and *Sivaratri-vrata*) falls on the fourteenth night of the dark half of every lunar month. His great (*maha*) night is in the lunar month of Magha (January/February) and is celebrated by all castes with elaborate rituals and offerings to *linga* (shape of the male organ) images. 'The most auspicious religious observance among the devotees of Siva – and one which marks the high point of the Saiva religious year is *Sivaratri*...In its simplest form this observance consists of keeping a vigil (*iagara*) throughout the night and performing continuous worship of Siva during the day...' (Long 1982:189). Music and dance often feature in the celebrations.

²³ This system runs parallel with the examination system of the *Academy of Fine Arts* and is used extensively in the Sri Lankan diaspora communities world-wide. See page 195 for details.

²⁴ The issue of menstruation related to participation in temple activities is discussed in full in Chapter Six.

²⁵ Norway's population contains around 0.25% Hindus of South Asian descent (11,000) and 75% of those are Tamil Hindus from Sri Lanka. 'Tamil Hinduism from Sri Lanka is therefore the dominant form of Hinduism in Norway' (Jacobsen 2004:135).

²⁶ *Mudralaya* dance school is run by two well-known professional Indian dancers, Pushkala Gopal (Bharatanatyam), and Unnikrishnan (Bharatanatyam and Kathakali). They have about 125 students enrolled in their lessons, including several male students (summer 2004). Both dancers also taught at the Tooting Muthumari Amman Temple, London, for several years.

²⁷ See endnote 22 above. The Malayalam New Year falls at the same time.

²⁸ The *kavadi* dance is also performed by the men devotees at the London Sri Murugan Temple in East Ham at their annual *Tai Pusam* festival in January/February. Two of the men participating

when I visited in February 2004 had their tongues and cheeks pierced; only one performed a rather wild dance, as if possessed. The other men carried the *kavadi* whilst walking in a slow, single-file processional line several times around the inside of the temple (author's fieldnotes 4.2.04).

²⁹ These instruments were 'traditionally the hereditary specializations of the Isai Vellala, [music landlords], a politically powerful community of Tamil Nadu' (Srinivasan 1998b:3). They play as an accompaniment to the deities, at times of ritual worship in the temple and at festival times, to initiate processions, and as a prelude to the deities' arrival on the streets during processions. As their sound is so powerful, they are considered to be outdoor instruments.

³⁰ Maheswaran told me that the temple had decided not to have body piercing during this festival as the children found it too upsetting (personal communication August 2002). There were men and boys dancing with the *kavadi* on their shoulders without body piercing.

³¹ As there are no comprehensive studies on Tamil worship in the UK, these details are taken from the 2003 *Tamil Pages*.

³² 'Saivism today is the second-largest segment of mainstream Hinduism, with several hundred million followers' (Klostermaier 1998:159). It is thought to be the oldest of the Hindu traditions of worship.

³³ Worship of the goddess is termed Shaktism and is an aspect of Saivism, although strict adherents of Saivism view it as a distinct and separate branch of Hinduism.

³⁴ Lakshmi –Narayana; Lakshmi is the feminine consort of Vishnu and as his *shakti* power, is considered to be the sustaining force in the universe. With him, she forms the dual deity called Lakshmi-Narayana 'symbolizing the transcendental unity of opposites in the absolute *brahman* or *paramatman*' (Werner 1997:94).

³⁵ Meenakshi is the consort of Siva, known in his form of Sundareswarar. They are south Indian names.

³⁶ I am indebted to Dr Crispin Branfoot of De Montfort University, Leicester, for his comments on these temple traditions.

³⁷ Joanne Punzo Waghorne, writing on the growth of diaspora temples world-wide, notes how she heard this story of each temple's origins in Chennai, London and Washington, indicating recurring 'themes of preserving culture and developing devotion in the midst of modern life' (2004:232).

³⁸ Sai Baba is also followed extensively by Hindus of Gujarati origin, both in the UK and world-wide. It is possible that this phenomenon suggests a move towards a more common British Hindu identity that encompasses both Vaishnavite and Saivite traditions. My thanks to Professor Ron Geaves for pointing out this fact (personal correspondence 18.11.04).

³⁹ There are four different Hindu calendars in use in the UK: a north Indian, a south Indian, and two Tamil ones. Although the Wimbledon temple has maintained a long association with the Murugan temple in East Ham, this East Ham temple is not part of the federation as they follow a south Indian calendar, and consider themselves as a south Indian, rather than Sri Lankan temple.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to D.A.Taylor (1994) for information about this temple. Waghorne's book (2004) devotes several pages to this and other London Tamil temples, including the London Sri Murugan

Temple, the London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, the Sri Kanagathurkkai Temple and the Sri Muthumari Temple.

⁴¹ The press release from the monarch's official website stated that the purpose of all the Royal visits to faith communities were to 'indicate respect for the diversity of faiths, to support inter-faith dialogue and to show that non-Christian as well as Christian communities are central to contemporary Britain' (www.royal.gov.uk/output/Page1117.asp [accessed 10.2.05]). Visits were made also to an Islamic centre, a Sikh *Gurdwara*, the Leicester Jain temple, a Jewish Museum and a Buddhist gathering.

⁴² The Sri Lankan political circumstances are never separate from religious or cultural affairs. O'Shea writes of a Tamil Sri Lankan dancer, choreographer and teacher, based in Toronto, who teaches Bharatanatyam there 'under the auspices of the Tamil Eelam Society, a Toronto-based organisation which exists primarily to provide social services for Tamil refugees, but which also, as its name implies, embraces a "counter-state nationalist" ...view of the Sri Lankan political situation' (2001:131).

⁴³ The first purpose-built UK south Indian Hindu temple is in the Midlands, near Birmingham. It is built in the Chola style and is dedicated to Lord Venkateswara (Vishnu). The foundation stone was laid in 1997, and the temple partially opened in 2001. It is functioning, but is not yet fully complete in its building plans. See www.venkateswara.org.uk for further information.

⁴⁴ Tamil and Telugu New Years are celebrated in Spring: the Telugu New Year, called *Ugadi* by the people of Andhra Pradesh falls in the Hindu month of *Chaitra*, in March/April, and the Tamil New Year in April. *Chaitra* is the start of the lunar calendar, which has some regional variations.

⁴⁵ O'Shea writes of the annual dance festival at Chidambaram, describing how it takes place outdoors 'with dancers performing in the public enclosure of a temple complex while the audience sits on the ground in rows that extend far back into the courtyard. Although represented as a "return" to temples, this event does not involve ritual praxis of any kind. It also remains largely separate from both the temple's religious practices and its community.' (O'Shea 2001:190-191). In an interview with a Hindu priest working temporarily at the Mahalakshmi temple in East Ham (author's fieldnotes 6.11.04), I was told that the main Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, south India now has performances of dance during *Navratri* and for the deities' annual wedding procession in April. This has gone on for the last five years in one of the temple halls. Both Bharatanatyam and Odissi styles are performed. Other temples hosting the new dance festivals are Ellora (in Maharashtra) and Khajuraho (in Madhya Pradesh). See also Katrak (2001:18.)

⁴⁶ Chidambaram, in south India, is a Saivite temple dedicated to the deity or lord of the dance, Siva Nataraj. It is the only temple to where the presiding deity is Siva in his dancing form, and a myth is told that Siva once danced there. The *gopuras* (gateways) of the temple contain stone carvings of the 108 dance positions.

⁴⁷ There are two levels of mythology presented here in the girls' responses. One alludes to the monolithic, unquestioned history of Bharatanatyam that speaks of this form of dance being handed down from Siva in his dance of creation, dancing the cosmos into existence – a history which continues to be presented to today's generation of dance students (Ramphal 2003). Secondly these Tamil girls are rehearsing their own taught Tamil history that views Siva as the deity of the Tamils and is alluded to in the ancient Tamil poems, as Prentiss notes:

The hymnists imagined Siva as one with the Tamil lands and culture. They see Him everywhere: Siva is in the hearts and minds of the Tamil people, Siva is in the stories of cosmic deeds and local bhaktas, Siva is in Tamil towns and lands, and Siva is in temples.

Prentiss 1999:52

Part Three: Analysis, Discussion and Reflections

CHAPTER SIX: Locating Dance in Hindu Religious Practice

6.1 Perceptions of religiosity in the dancing body

Secularism and religion in dance have coexisted in history without any clash, because secularism is not understood as being irreligious.
Subrahmanyam 2001:21

As discussed in previous chapters, many South Asian dance performers and students conceptualise their dance practices as synonymous with their religious beliefs, viewing dance as a perfect vehicle through which to express their faith or their spirituality. This does not appear to be a traditional, unquestioned notion, imparted through their gurus of the dance's historical status and place within the ancient treatises and India's religious tradition, but a living, practical application of their devotion to God. Indeed, the SADiB report discovered that for many dancers working as part of the British Asian diaspora, 'spirituality is an integral part of the movements' (Grau 2002:55) and that it 'remains undoubtedly significant for many dancers in contemporary Britain' (ibid:70). Gaston (1991:160) emphasises the point relating to the diaspora context, stating that 'expatriate communities consistently place a greater emphasis on the religious or devotional elements of the dance'. In her analysis of the changing forms of Bharatanatyam, Gaston concludes that:

Generally, there has been an attempt to validate the antiquity of the dance by emphasizing the religious rather than the secular. This increasing religiosity in the dance relates to social changes affecting dancers and dance audiences.

Gaston 1996:312

Both the folk and the classical dance forms of India have always maintained aspects of the secular and sacred, displaying modes of communication pertinent to courts, temples, stages, marriages, festivals and general entertainment and enjoyment. The original tradition of the *devadasis* offered a highly religious and ritualised movement vocabulary

used specifically in the temples, and a greater range of dances and songs for festival occasions, for entertainment at the royal court and for marriages (Kersenboom 1991). As Subrahmanyam states above, the sacred and the secular are not dichotomous strands, but are woven together in the totality of Hindu cultural, aesthetic and religious thought, unlike the western dualistic and Durkenheimian view which seeks to alienate the sacred from the secular.

Gaston's work analyses to what extent the new, evolved form of Bharatanatyam that we see today is based on the ritual of the *devadasis*. There appears to be a heavy irony in some of today's 'religious' practices within the dance form, as much of what had been rejected when the dance was 'purified' and 'made respectable' by the reformers, is now an integral part of *arangetrams* and other performances. Gaston points out that the ritual first lesson for the young *devadasi*, although not currently followed in that form, has been replaced by a similar ritual offering of fruits, flowers and gifts to the dance guru at the commencement of study. The worship of the bells on stage, the offering of flowers (*pushpanjali*) and the form of the *arangetram* all follow closely the *devadasi* pattern.

Other innovations of a quasi-religious type have also appeared. As a result, Bharata Natyam has more rituals and ceremonies attached to it today than it had during the period of its revival, when strenuous efforts were made to dissociate it from *sadir* [devadasi dance].

Gaston 1996:312

Two *arangetrams* I attended in London had dedicated the first twenty minutes of the long evening to an elaborate, on-stage *puja*, and the ritual blessing of the bells for the dancer and the *talam*.¹ Prayers were chanted, offerings of fruit, flowers and gifts made and full obeisances performed by the dancer to her gurus, the priest and her parents, in front of a beautifully decorated shrine at the stage front left. When I later discussed this with one of the dance teachers involved she explained that if the families wished, a full *puja* was performed at the temple the day before, or on the morning of the *arangetram*, rather than onstage (author's fieldnotes 12.3.03). During this ceremony, the priest will chant special Sanskrit verses dedicated to Siva, and the bells and costumes are blessed. Some of the Tamil parents make a vow at this stage that after their daughter's (or son's) *arangetram*, a performance will be given to the temple as an act of devotion, called *Samarparnam* (see

Chapter Five). Other aspects of *arangetrams* follow the traditional *devadasi* or temple ritual; for example, the *mallavi*, a musical piece played on the *nagaswaram* exclusively for the temple deities when they are brought out of the temple is now choreographed for Bharatanatyam. One *arangetram* I attended offered this as the opening item (author's fieldnotes 14.9.03).

The six main South Asian dance teachers in Leicester, when asked in a questionnaire about the importance of the religious aspect of the dance, all acknowledged its significance in their performance and teaching. One commented that it was this aspect that first inspired her to take up dance, and another wrote of the large number of dances based on religious themes. One young performer (and teacher) stated, 'To me dance is a form of devotion. I dance to feel closer to God', and another, a Kathak dancer added, 'For me, the dance is very spiritual, and is a way of expressing Hindu philosophy and culture'. A further respondent, a Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher expressed that the religious aspect carried the most significance, and that without it one could not understand the classical dance. Despite the fact that in Leicester interest is waning in the classical dance forms, and attraction to Bollywood or filmi dance is growing rapidly (see Chapter Seven), the established teachers and performers are convinced of the serious and meaningful place of religion in the dance forms they teach and practise.

In London, one senior Bharatanatyam teacher at the Harrow Tamil School spoke too of her commitment to a deeper understanding of the dance. She refuses to use the term 'religion', preferring instead to speak of 'spirituality' or 'philosophy'. Describing her work with the young students learning Bharatanatyam, she said:

I find that if you dedicate the dance, whatever you do, you do it to the higher Self. I try to tell the kids to dedicate it to a higher aspect, rather than just doing it for the public. To dedicate themselves, trying to reach the Paramatman (inner Self). Through music dance, movement, but in the Asian context – Bharatanatyam – we feel that is one way of connecting.

Interview with author 25.1.04

Her dedicated and conscientious approach to her teaching is highly successful. She is one of the only London teachers to have an older group of young women who are continuing to dance, at a very high standard, and who are at work, or at university. Two

of the group are married. These young women have been trained by her since a young age and now choreograph dances, perform (non-professionally) and teach younger students at the Tamil School. They have a warm, supportive relationship with their teacher and spoke to me of their respect for her teaching and of their commitment to the dance and the ‘philosophy’ behind it. Their commitment and disposition to Bharatantyam authenticated in practice what their teacher had stated.

The well-known Asian male dancer, Akram Khan, has raised some problematic issues regarding the religiosity of the dance form. He is aware of an inner tension when performing his contemporary work, as the ‘feeling’ of the stage as a temple, which he experiences with his classical Kathak, was not present. He questioned how he could draw the two together to diffuse the tension. Later he elaborated on this saying that even his abstract, contemporary work is full of meaning and of emotion.

For me, when I enter the stage, it becomes like a temple. It’s just natural to me because of the tradition and training in classical dance. Contemporary dance is more about the structure and the geometry –it’s presenting shapes that are trying to say something. Everything on stage is always living. It’s been made by a human being and is danced by a human being, so there is an inherent spirituality there anyway. The question is how to convey that in a more ‘abstract’ piece...Indian dance has spirituality embedded in it. How do you train other dancers in that? How do you find the dancers that are interested in that?

Khan, interview with author 25.10.04

6.2 Dance and the temple

What of the religious significance of performing *in* the temple? Many dancers have recounted their experiences of performing inside the temple and near to the deities, and the profound effect that has had on their performance (see Chapter Five). The temple has always played a role as a setting for religious experience, as well as embracing cultural, social, familial, economic and occasionally political activities. This continues today as it did in the past. Elements of Michell’s description of the temple in the pre-modern period are recognisable in contemporary experience:

The temple has always been the centre of the intellectual and artistic life of the Hindu community, functioning not only as a place of worship, but also as a nucleus around which all artistic activity is concentrated...

The spacious halls of the temples were settings for recitations of the Vedas, the Epics and the Puranas, and the singing of hymns and devotional chanting, of benefit to the whole community. Music and dance generally formed part of the daily ritual of the temple and during special celebrations and annual festivals these played a particularly dominant role.

Michell 1998:58

Evidence of the latter, of dance and music playing a significant part in the ‘special celebrations and annual festivals’ is the central core of this investigation, revealing itself to be a thriving aspect of today’s practice of Hinduism in the UK.

The strict rules codifying the building of Hindu temples set out in the *Shilpaprakasha*² are dominated by a complex cosmic symbolism, and conceive of the temple as a cosmos in miniature, a place which functions as a link between the gods and man, even ‘a replica of the cosmos, which brings alive the cosmic man (*purusha*)’ (Champakalakshmi 2001:13). The image of the cosmic man is thought to be held within the sacred geometric ground plan, the *vastupurushamandala*, and the buildings of the temple; the base of the temple is described anthropomorphically as the feet (*pada*), the walls as the body and limbs (*griva*) and the roof as the head (*sikara*). ‘The symbolism is further emphasised by the whole shrine being described as the womb house (*garbha griha*) in which the deity is placed’ (ibid:29). This is where the central image is placed, usually only accessible to qualified priests, and certainly not to non-Hindus. The dome of this inner sanctum, or ‘womb chamber’ represents the mountain peak, symbol of sacred purity and the abode of the gods, reached only through arduous pilgrimage. It indicates the transcending from the mundane to the divine. Sometimes the levels in the dome or tower are likened to the points of the *chakra* in the human body. These *chakras* also need to be transcended in the journey to *moksha*, or liberation. As Huyler summarises:

The temple compound is thus a microcosm, a conscious replica of the conceptual universe. It functions not only as a seat of the Gods but also as a metaphysical means of transcending the exterior worlds and entering the center, visualized as the matrix of creation. Consequently, the entire temple plan is intended to assist the progression of the devotee from mundane existence to divine realization.

Huyer 1999:132

Waghorne writes too of a renowned Indian architect, V.Ganapathi Sthapati, who has designed many new temples in Indian and abroad, and who states ‘that the entire temple is the body of God’ (Waghorne 2004:180).

Further emphasis is given to the relationship of man and the temple, this time correlated to dance, in legendary dancer Balasaraswati’s description of a performance of Bharatanatyam.³ The performance is seen as being analogous to a devotee entering the temple for worship. Here Balasaraswati speaks of the Bharatanatyam recital using the imagery of the structure of a great Hindu temple, each item of the performance being likened to a further step on the journey inwards both physically and metaphorically. As the dancer dances, it is as if she proceeds towards a meeting of the deity in the temple’s sacred space.

We enter through the *Gopurum* (outer hall) of Alarippu⁴ cross the *Ardha mantapam* (half-way hall) of Jatiswaram, then the *Mantapa* (great hall) of Shabdham, and enter the holy precinct of the deity in the Varnam. This is the place, the space that gives the dancer expansive scope to revel in the rhythm, moods and music of the dance. The Varnam is the perpetuity which gives ever-expanding room to the dancer to delight in her self-fulfillment[sic], by providing the fullest scope to her own creativity as well as to the tradition of the art.

Balasarawati, presidential address, 1975:2-3

Balasaraswati then explains that this is followed by the *padam*, a powerful devotional piece in a Bharatanatyam performance, which is akin to the inner psychological move of the devotee ‘when the cascading lights of worship are withdrawn and the drum beats die down to the simple and solemn chanting of sacred verses in the closeness of God’ (ibid). Then follows the final, jubilant *tillana*, expressing by analogy the climax of *darshan*⁵ in the temple, with the burning of the camphor lights and the roar and bustle of the devotees. The culmination of the dance performance is seen to be synonymous with the most important and sacred aspect of temple worship – *darshan* - the moment of beholding the deity and through the seeing, receiving the blessings of the divine. In that powerful moment, all differences are dissolved. Balasaraswati’s conviction of the religiosity and spirituality inherent in the form of Bharatanatyam are encapsulated here:

From start to finish, a Bharata Natyam recital is so arranged as to make the body shed its earthly and physical characteristics, step by step, in the process of realizing the divinity of the spirit encased within the body. Though it is an art blossoming through bodily movements, these very

movements enable the blossom of the body to fructify into the fruit of the spirit.
Balasaraswati 1985:3

Bala was insistent that when Bharatanatyam was transformed into staged performances outside of the temple setting, it was a concert, not a religious or ritual form. She did not believe in bringing the temple to the stage (Gaston 1996, O'Shea 2001). This contrasted sharply with Rukmini Devi's⁶ intention for the dance, which *was* to create a temple atmosphere on the stage. Devi's innovation, to place a sculpture of Lord Siva in his dancing form of Nataraj at the corner of the stage and to perform *puja* to the icon before the performance began was part of her move to create a religiosity and a valid antiquity for her newly 'renovated' Bharatanatyam style.⁷ The ironic twist in the story has not gone unnoticed by today's scholars of Indian dance, as Gaston (1996), Meduri (1996), Allen (1997) and O'Shea (2001), reveal – Devi sought to displace the dance's connection with the devadasi and temple tradition to make it 'respectable' and 'pure', yet in her actions, in fact incorporated elements of what she considered a vulgar tradition into the revised form. These elements from *devadasi* practice included the worship of the ankle bells, Devi's own performance of the *arangetram*, the attempt to transform the stage into a religious setting, and her employment of teachers from the *devadasi* tradition to teach at her school in Madras.

The tradition of the *devadasi* dance was both sacred and secular (Srinivasan 1985, Kersenboom 1991, Gaston 1996, Meduri 2001⁸). In Tamil Nadu, south India, most temples were constructed with an adjoining *mantapa*, a hall built especially for performances of dance and drama. Many of these were pillared, and in addition, had carved stone receptacles that were specifically designed to hold the oil that was lit during evening performances. These events were different from the ritual music and dance executed by the *devadasis*,⁹ who were employed by the temple for specific service for the deities when they would not be performing for an audience, or for the devotees. At those times, their work was solely for the gods. For the ritual *puja* during the awakening, bathing or feeding of the deities, the women would sing and dance, and only the Brahmin priests, conducting the ritual would be in attendance. These dances for the deities were very specific and full of ritual elements, but the *devadasis* would also perform in the

temple dance dramas for the devotees, as well as offering their dance services at weddings and other festival occasions. These dances would incorporate what is now classified as classical as well as folk steps.¹⁰

The significance of the relationship between dance and the temples is vividly illustrated too by the presence of sculptural dance stone carvings, most famously depicted in the temple at Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu, but also in temples such as Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Tiruvannamalai and Vriddhacalam which provide ‘a comprehensive visual record of these forms of pure dance’ (Guy 1997:33). Indian dancer Padma Subrahmanyam has reconstructed these sculptural positions and postulated that they show actual dance movements and not just static poses as has always been assumed. From this she has developed a system of dance called ‘Bharata Nrityam’. Her premise is that the sculptural stone carvings adorning the temple walls are an exposition of Chapter Four of the Sanskrit text, the *Natyashastra*, which itself deals with the *karanas*, or units of movement. She argues that the inscriptions found along with the *karana* sculptures ‘prove that they were not meant as mere architectural embellishments, but as permanent illuminaries of the knowledge of Bharata’s [author of *Natayshastra*] art’ (1988:3).

The discussion so far raises some pertinent questions relating to the dancer, the devotees and the deities, when performances are given *in* the temple. For whom is the dance performed? Is it for the deities? Is it for the devotees? If so, is it acceptable for the dancer to have his or her back to the deities?¹¹ These questions have been raised in interviews during the course of the research with dance practitioners and those running the activities of the temples. Several dancers have spoken to me of the power of the moment of contact with the deities, of facing them and offering the dance to them when performing in the temple’s sacred space. At recent Bharatanatyam performances for *Navratri* in the Mahalakshmi Temple in East Ham, the dancers performed in the small ritual space directly in front of the main deity. They performed with their backs to the deity, but facing the devotees, a characteristic perhaps of staged auditorium performance. A professional Odissi dancer who often performs in temples both in the UK and in India described dancing so that her back was never towards the deities – not always easy to

achieve when there is limited space. This same dancer spoke too of performing at the newly-established temple dance festivals in India where performances take place outside of the temple on specially created stages. The concerts are held in the evening and are attended by many hundreds of people, seated as if in an outside auditorium. The dancers, if they wish, may perform their own dance *puja* in front of the deities before going on stage, in the inner hall of the temple rather than the sacred inner sanctum, and away from the audience (interview 16.10.01).¹²

One British Bharatanatyam dancer performed for two consecutive nights in London during celebrations for the festival of *Mahasivaratri*. The first ‘performance’ (with no stage, or special lighting), took place *in* the temple, beside the main shrine to Siva, and the space there enabled her to dance both toward the shrine and the deity, and to the audience. Some of her observations on this event are given in Chapter Five. The next evening she danced not in a temple, but on a stage in a secular venue, where ceremonies and *puja* for the same festival were being conducted and where the dance was ‘presented’ to the audience sitting in the auditorium seats. Although she had found the experience in the temple to be most profound, these were her comments on the second performance:

The next day was quite different. I think it represents my feelings about the nature of sanctity. The stage has always been a sacred space for me, so dancing there was no less sacred than the temple. In terms of my experience, the second performance was more powerful. I really felt Siva around me and inside me...In both cases, I did not treat it as a performance, at all. It was not a performance for an audience. The dance was for Siva; it is Siva.

Personal communication, 28.3.02

I will return to the important concept of sacred space shortly, but it is necessary first to note the point made by the dancer that in her mind and experience, the dance was not, in both cases, for the audience. But it was very obvious on the two occasions that the audience was visibly moved by watching her performance, and that the potency of the dancer’s experience was conveyed to those of us watching. The dissolving of difference between the dancer, the devotees and the deity to some extent did take place, perhaps in this case, intensified by the heightened experience of the dancer.

The director of London's Bhavan Centre where this second performance occurred, remarked to me that 'anywhere we worship is the temple; the stage is the temple- God is there' (author's fieldnotes 29.9.01), dismissing notions that only in the temple is there sacred space. The practice at *Navratri* by the Gujarati community of hiring large local halls in which a transportable shrine is set up, transforms the hall into a sacred space, a temporary temple, where worship of the goddess *Devi* is undertaken. It is no less a religious occasion because it is not in a temple. In fact, decisions as to whether or not to hold dance performances *in* the temples or in the halls adjacent to the temples are often made for purely functional or practical reasons. At the Ealing Amman temple, if the hall is busy with wedding celebrations, then the temple will be used for cultural performance; if not, or if the temple is too crowded, the hall with its stage will be used. It is a flexible situation. Rather differently, at the East Ham Murugan temple, the president explained to me that the hall is *always* used for performances, as they feel it is a distraction to have a dance or music recital *in* the temple while the temple is open for *puja* and prayers. In Wimbledon, at the Ghanapathy temple, performances scheduled to be *in* the temple might be changed at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances and for practical reasons. This happened during the *Navratri* festival (October 2003) when an enormous fire sacrifice (*hommam*) was held during the day in the temple. The fire was still smouldering in the evening when the cultural performances were due to take place in the temple, so they were moved to the adjoining community hall. Again, both spaces are entirely adaptable.

This rather functional and pragmatic attitude to the use of space and to matters sacred and secular is met frequently in Hindu religious and cultural life. In the temple, during *puja*, mobile phones will ring and get answered, money is constantly changing hands as people pay for the special *puja* or for their personal *archanas*,¹³ the main telephone for bookings is busy with calls, people chat to friends, babies cry and toddlers run around. Life and religion are not dichotomous paths, as living *is* the expression of Hinduism. Similarly, dance and life are not independent of each other, nor is dance independent of religion. A vivid account of an Indian *mela* (gathering, festival) mounted at the Smithsonian Institute

in Washington DC in 1985 described how a facsimile temple was constructed by the Smithsonian workers to illustrate the architectural form of a Hindu temple. But,

the notion of a facsimile temple did not sit well with Mela participants. On the first day of the festival, the signs came down. In ensuing days, the potter made a clay *yoni* (divine womb) to match and serve as receptacle for the exhibited polished stone *lingam* (phallus). The priest painted symbols on the structure indicating a Shiva temple...By the end of the first week, daily *puja* was performed in the now-no-longer-facsimile temple. Gujarat dancers performed in its previously undefined courtyard, and *bhajans* were sung there.

Kurin 1991:330

The space was transformed by the Hindu participants into a sacred/ritual space, just as when dancers perform their invocatory bow before performing, making the stage then sacrosanct. This was noted too in the SADiB report:

Looking at choreography one can see that observing the way dancers approach the dance space shows another kind of link with spirituality. In many genres space is consecrated by the dancer's invocation, for example, and this invocation transforms it so that it can be inhabited in a special way.

Grau 2002:70

When the deities are brought out into the streets surrounding the temple for festival processions, such as the chariot festivals (*ter*) or the Ratha Yatra Festival, these streets too become sacred/ritual space. Within the temple, the sacred space is animated by the movement of the deities, the priests and the worshippers.

The senior Hindu priest at the East Ham temple, *Gurukkal* Sri Naganatha Sivam is adamant that dance belongs in the temple because dance and spirituality cannot be separated. He strongly believes that the classical forms of music and dance should be supported and nurtured by the temples, and that they in turn, provide the richness, beauty and devotional vehicles for true worship.¹⁴ He is concerned too that dance has become a 'rich' art form, needing large payments to teachers, expensive costumes, jewellery and money for the *arangetrams*, and that the temples cannot afford to pay dancers to perform. He continued, 'People now think it is more prestigious to dance in big hired halls rather than as an offering in the temple' (interview 13.2.03. See accompanying DVD Track 6 for film extract of this interview.)

At the *Navratri* festivities in their Murugan temple (October 2003), Sri Naganatha Sivam was closely involved with the girls' dance performance, arranging the setting up of smaller deities on the stage and introducing the girls and their studies in dance (in Tamil). When interviewed more formally on these matters (13.2.03; and author's fieldnotes 11.3.03) he described the dance form of Bharatanatyam as akin to the enactment of the ritual *puja* in the temple. The *puja* embodies three distinct and essential aspects – *kriya* (literally 'action', here meaning 'hand gesture'), *bhavana* (emotion), and *dhyana* (meditation) – and all three must be present for the *puja* to be complete and successful. Similarly, these three features are fundamental to the dance form, the hand gestures forming one aspect of the *abhinaya*, or expression of the emotional content of the dance. The priest then explained how *shakti* power is made available through the hand gestures in both the ritual *mudra* (gestures)¹⁵ used in worship, and in the dance movements. He spoke of their essential potency to communicate. When asked whether dance in the temples is for the deities or the devotees, he replied that it has a two-fold purpose – that it pleased the deities when offered to them solely, but that it is also important for the worshippers to enjoy.

This same conviction of the essential place of cultural activities within the temple was stressed by one of the music teachers at the Bhavan Centre, who has organised many music and dance performance in Tamil temples. She believes that unless the temples play their part in encouraging the teaching and performance of traditional practices, these forms will die out. Her view is that art, culture, life and God cannot be separated, and so the temple is the most suitable location for endorsing spiritual and cultural expression. She spoke too of a tradition of sacred hymns that were always sung as part of temple worship – as part of the *puja* – called *Panchapuranam*. In the past it was believed that unless these were sung during *puja*, the *puja* was not complete. Her concern is that the majority of young people are not being trained in this tradition. During the *Mahasivratri* celebrations at the Highgatehill Murugan Temple in March 2002 where she had organised the music, and dance for the first time, her young group sang two of the devotional *bhajans* to Siva that form part of this tradition.¹⁶

6.3 Dance and 'possession'

During religious occasions it is not unusual to observe one or more worshippers moving or dancing in a state of possession or trance. At one of the first Gujarati *Navratri* evenings I attended in a hired school sports hall in north London, as the *puja* took place with 300-400 hundred devotees encircling the central shrine, an elderly woman began to shake, and dance freely in front of the gathered crowd. She appeared mildly out of control, with closed eyes as if not really present. My hosts pointed her out to me, proudly saying:

This doesn't happen very often. She's been taken over by the goddess. She doesn't know what is happening. It's because of her purity and the purity here.

Author's fieldnotes 25.10.01

As she danced, the woman clapped her hands ecstatically, and then stood still, whilst her body shook violently. Several other women near to her supported her and watched that she did not fall. The highly charged religious and powerfully devotional atmosphere during the prayers and the auspiciousness of the event is given for the reason for this condition and indicated that the evening is of high ritual and social status. At another Gujarati *Navratri* occasion, a year later, a much younger woman was seen to go into a trance during the *puja*. In her possessed state, she cried out loudly, dancing and jumping wildly, her long hair unbound and flying out (at other times, signifying a state of impurity), as she moved. She shook her head forcefully, clapped her hands and kept crying out for quite some time, whilst everyone watched. When she stopped, many touched her to take *darshan*, as she was understood as this point to be inhabited by the goddess. It was considered highly auspicious to touch her.¹⁷

Possessed people (women and men) are regarded as divine, their supernatural powers enabling them to act as oracles, to bless others, and, very often, to heal. Many women who regularly enter trances at festivals are regarded with great respect, and even reverence, in their communities.

Diesel 2003:45

On enquiring of my hosts later about this state of possession, they spoke of two different types of trance. One is the goddess in her benign form as *Devi* - quiet, loving and controlled. The other is the more terrifying aspect of the goddess as Kali, as was observed in the younger woman. Huyler (1999:228) points out that 'possession by a

deity is not uncommon in India' and that anyone from any walk of life may be possessed. Kapadia, in her discussion of Tamil possession, describes it as being 'essentially an exhibition, a display. It is a manifestation of a deity's power and grace' (2000:186). The unpredictable nature of possession, in that it can happen during *puja*, or whilst singing *bhajans* or in having *darshan* with a deity, or at any time or place allows it to be accepted and honoured in Hindu society, demonstrating that it is possible for a devotee to become united, albeit briefly, with his favoured deity. This is the sought- after 'enhanced level of intimacy between worshipper and deity' (Waghorne and Cutler 1985:38) which is the common goal of Hindu worship.

Dancing whilst possessed is also common during some of the important Tamil festivals, particularly (in some London temples) the August chariot festival, as well as the January *Tai Pusam Kavadi* festival. As described in Chapter Five, the men undertaking the *kavadi* vow (*vrata*)¹⁸ are in a state of possession, where not only do they dance, but are believed to be possessed by the deity who will in turn be pleased by their state of purity and devotion and will grant them their boons. These vows are made by the men for members of their families or for their friends, in order to avert or cure sickness, to help in times of trouble, or more altruistically, for the sake of the world. They also have submitted themselves to body piercing. Before beginning the body piercing, the dancing, and the carrying of the heavy weight of the wooden *kavadi* on their shoulders, the men will have undertaken various purifying rituals for the days leading up to the event. Fasting, bathing and praying will have been rigorously practised to enable a condition for the deity to take possession. Then on the day itself, this state of purity and the devotion practised empowers the men in such a way that they are said to feel no pain when their skin is pierced. In fact, Kapadia notes that in matters of possession,

Ritual purity is of secondary importance: it is merely necessary so that the person might be a fit vehicle for the deity, and so certain simple measures (involving vegetarianism, chastity and extreme cleanliness) are taken by the person seeking to be possessed. But it is devotion that counts above all.

Kapadia 2000:183

One man I witnessed undertook a vow to roll prostrate on the ground around the four local streets of the Wimbledon temple in front of the chariot carrying the deity. He wore

cotton Indian clothes and had bare feet, and wore no extra protection for his body. The procession lasted for at least two hours, as the chariot made slow progress, stopping every few yards for the devotees to perform *puja* to the deity.

Figure 35. Male devotees rolling on the streets around the temple during the annual *Ther* festival at the Shree Ghanapathy Temple, August 2004.

It is a well-recognised fact in the Tamil Hindu community that piercing, self-mutilation or the ritual practice of fire-walking are proof of the existence of a ‘possessing deity whose protective powers prevent any harm to the dancers’ (Blackburn 1981:217), although men and women, as already indicated are watchfully present in case of any human error. Blackburn writes of a localised oral tradition in Tamil south India called the ‘bow song’, which takes its name from the six to twelve foot long bow instrument that is played, along with several other instruments. Performances take place at festival times and are accompanied by actors who go into a state of possession during key points in the narrative. The possession dance is the ‘central focus of the entire festival’ and is

known as 'god dance', and the medium is described as the 'god dancer' (ibid:216).

Blackburn adds this description:

The possession dance is also a register of the affective intensity or 'ritual depth' of the festival. Ritual depth refers to the relative level of emotional power and ceremonial import that underlies the event. Although essentially a subjective quality, it is unmistakable precisely at those points of the narrative and ritual convergence. There it exhibits certain observable features in its primary expression as dance; significantly, although people can identify possession by its inner state ('frenzy'), they always refer to it simply as 'dance' (*attam*).

Blackburn 1981:217

Research carried out by Willford on the Tamil community in Malaysia found that 'a resurgence of Tamil Hindu consciousness is being expressed through dramatic rituals which often include practices of self-mortification' (Willford 2002:247), and that through the festivals such as *Tai Pusam*, a greater 'Tamilness' is being signified and asserted in such an Islamic state. Willford argues how in the current situation where the Tamils feel that they are losing their cultural, economic and political rights, the main avenue for expression of Tamil ethnic identity is through their cultural and religious practices. This has led to an 'increase in the size and intensity of a number of festivals, a proliferation of urban shrines, and a growing clientele for spirit mediums' (ibid:255). Bearing the *kavadi* for Lord Murugan has grown rapidly in importance in Malaysia, and the 1995 and 1996 *Tai Pusam* festivals 'reportedly drew around one million people each, the overwhelming majority being Tamils' (ibid:257). Large numbers of men and women will go into a trance and perform energetic dances, the men enacting 'a feverish traditional circular-step *kavadi* dance' (ibid:260).¹⁹

Figure 36. Senior priest helping devotees prepare the *Kavadi* for *Tai Pusam* at Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham, January 2004.

Figure 37. Carrying *Kavadi* at *Tai Pusam* festival at Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham, January 2004. Devotee on the right has piercings in his cheeks and tongue.

The ‘greater Tamilness being asserted’ is clear too in the London Hindu Tamil communities – not because of overt threats to their religious identity as for the Tamils in Malaysia – but because of a newer confidence²⁰ in celebrating publicly and the need to consciously transmit their culture to the younger generation growing up in a more predominately secular state.

6.4 Hindu concepts of purity and pollution

Purity matters here. This is a holy place, and the most ardent of the pilgrims who travel the length and breadth of the subcontinent to reach it are obsessed, above all, with what is pure and what is impure. Such considerations can shape their whole lives, everything they do, all that happens to them from conception to the pyre.

Moorhouse 1993:12

It has already been noted that one of the essential preconditions for entering a state of possession is that the devotee is in a state of ritual purity (*shuddha*). If he feels pain from any piercings, or the vow is unsuccessful, it is assumed that his preparation has not been ardent enough; that he is not ritually pure (*ashuddha*). The complexities of the binding nature of the relationship between purity and pollution in everyday life, according to Hindu religious thought, can prove problematic for the non-Hindu to comprehend, but its all-encompassing character as part of Hinduism demands a certain level of analysis. A simplified account is presented here in order to assess its influence on dance practices, but which certainly does not claim to examine comprehensively this extraordinary matrix of Hindu thought as it is greater than the scope of the current chapter. M.N. Srinivas refers to the fact that every Indian language incorporates terms for both ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’, adding that

pollution may refer to uncleanness, defilement, impurity short of defilement, and indirectly even to sinfulness, while purity refers to cleanliness, spiritual merit, and indirectly to holiness.

Srinivas 1968:120

It is also noted by Susan Bean (1981:587) that ‘the vocabulary of “pollution” and “dirt” is much more highly developed than that of “purity” and “cleanliness” in Sri Lankan Tamil.

The concept of purity, (not to be confused with the western concept of hygiene), is essential to the Hindu world-view of humans and their hierarchical position within that perspective. On one level, the physical body is polluted everyday by eating, procreating, emission of bodily fluids and excreta as well as hair and nail clippings. These regular pollutants are dealt with by daily ablutions and, in orthodox households, by employing someone to cook, to wash the clothes and remove the polluting substances. This practice reveals another deeper level of conception of purity and pollution – that of caste. The lower castes, who are considered to be in a state of constant pollution because of the ‘substance of the bodies they are born with, the Untouchables²¹ are often forbidden entry to Hindu temples or shrines which are administered by Brahmins’ (Flood 2002:219). These lower castes form the work force of *dhobis* (washermen and women), barbers, shoe-makers, toilet cleaners and road sweepers, allowing purity to be maintained by the highest caste, the Brahmins, who are considered to be the most ritually pure by substance. ‘The scale of purity and pollution is an organizing principle and constraint which controls the regulation of bodies in social space in Hinduism’ explains Flood (ibid:220).

Further, more serious forms of temporary pollution are encountered in life events, such as birth, death and grieving, and menstruation, for which certain ritual prayers and cleansing ceremonies have to be undergone before entering the temple or performing rites at the household shrine. Although this pollution is critical, and unavoidable, it may be controlled. At the East Ham Murugan temple, informants discussed with me the practices for a family after the arrival of a new-born child. The temple priest will visit the family home for a purification ceremony with special prayers for the mother, baby and the rest of the family, thirty-one days after the birth. This cleanses the family so that they may then return to the temple for worship. But for the mother and baby a further ten-day period is observed before she and the child are considered ‘pure’ enough to once again enter the temple (author’s fieldnotes 15.10.03). Despite the polluting aspect of birth, successful family progeny (particularly of male children) is celebrated in Hindu life, bringing a new and higher status to the mother. It is thought to be auspicious (*shubha*). The double-layered meaning of these events is described here by Flood:

Birth, especially of a boy, is a joyous and auspicious occasion for Hindus, but it is also hedged about with uncertainty and impurity, for all

biological processes are considered to be polluting and so necessitate ritual control.

Flood 2002:203

Conversely, childless couples are considered at the least unfortunate, and at worst, as inauspicious (*ashubha*), and special *puja* ceremonies are available to pray for these circumstances to change. Couples will also undergo fasting and take on vows and penances with an aim to assist a pregnancy to materialise. Organisation and control of these life-polluting factors are a powerful force in Hindu practice, enabling life to continue in an ordered and lawful manner. As Mary Douglas points out in her seminal book *Purity and Danger* in a discussion relating to the disorder created by any form of dirt: 'Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment' (Douglas 2002[1976]:2). Douglas's work revealed how purity equates with clear boundaries and order in a society, whereas pollution encourages ambiguity, confusion and a lack of order. Using Durkheimian concepts of social order and social cohesion, Douglas showed how 'societies related pollution to their moral values, with rites and practices aimed at reducing risk and danger to their people' (Khare 1998:437).

The temple, Fuller informs us, where the deities are believed to reside and where a devotee can contract a special relationship with those deities, 'must always be kept in a high state of purity' (Fuller 1975:464) so that this contact can be made. Through the condition of purity, the gods' power can flow, and be received by the devotees in *darshan*. It is generally believed that the deities cannot be defiled, as they 'are assumed to be inestimably pure' (ibid: 469) but that they may become displeased by any impurity and so withdraw their potent power and their protection. Hence the importance of the ritual purity of the priests, the intermediaries between the deities and the worshippers, who are the only humans allowed in the sacred inner sanctum of the gods, and the only ones able to have full physical contact with (that is, to touch, bathe, dress, ornament and to feed) the deities.²²

It is important to note the transformative features of the concepts of purity and impurity in that it is a constantly changing position. As shown above, impurity may be controlled and circumstances brought again to a state of purity through ritual conduct. Within this framework there are levels of purity and impurity, and what is impure on one level, becomes pure when considered on an inferior level. Cow dung exemplifies this: although the dung is the excreta of the animal and therefore intrinsically impure, the cow is regarded as holy and auspicious, so rendering the dung pure (see Douglas 2002 [1966]:11). It is believed to be a more powerful cleansing agent than water and is therefore used as such. Huyler (2002) describes how the village women in Rajasthan will cover their homes with mud and animal dung before painting them with geometric designs to worship the goddess Lakshmi. Left-over cooked food is also viewed as polluting, and most Hindus will not eat it. Yet when food is cooked and offered to the deities in the temple, the 'left-overs' are then considered highly auspicious by the lower beings, the humans, who describe this food as *prasada*,²³ and view it as a great and honoured gift. The food from the gods has now been transformed, transmuted by the deity and empowered by the deity's substance.

6.4:1 Auspicious and non-auspicious factors

It is critical to indicate here that the terms 'purity' and 'pollution' are not synonymous with 'auspicious' and 'non-auspicious', as is sometimes believed to be the case. The first two concepts – purity and pollution - (*shuddha* and *ashuddha*), are an attribute of people or objects, and form 'a scale of status hierarchy which corresponds to the caste hierarchy with the Brahmans at the top and the *dalits* at the bottom' (Flood 2002:67). Auspicious and non-auspicious (*shubha* and *ashubha*) refer in particular to events, and likewise create 'a scale of the degree to which events, times and relationships are conducive to the well-being of the society or individual (ibid). Auspiciousness is a non-hierarchical state of well-being. In everyday speech, *shubha* and *ashubha* are associated with words such as 'season', 'month', 'day', 'occasion' and 'festival', whereas *shuddha* and *ashuddha* are not (Madan 1985:12). As referred to above, a birth can be both *ashuddha* (polluting) and *shubha* (auspicious).

The *devadasi* dancers were viewed as being highly auspicious, not only in their functions in the temple, but for their presence at other secular occasions such as marriages, festivals, and initiation and dedication ceremonies which was highly sought after. In fact, Marglin calls them ‘specialists in auspiciousness’ (cited in Madan 1985:22) and Gaston, an ‘embodiment of auspiciousness’ (1996:32). Their favourable presence relates to their freedom from the adversity of widowhood, as in theory they were married to the deity. They were highly honoured by the temple and its congregation and ‘life honours were granted to the *devadasi* at the time of her death’ (Srinivasan 1985:1870). But the *devadasis* were also considered impure, as they were permitted to live as concubines of the temple priests, or of wealthy Brahmin patrons of the temple. In Orissa, east India, these relationships between the *devadasis* and the male temple servants were thought to confer both the power of auspiciousness of the goddess Lakshmi (whom the *devadasis* embodied) and the benefits of her sovereignty to the men. Here auspiciousness also carries the meanings of abundance, prosperity and fertility (Marglin 1990). In Orissa too, the *devadasis* were not supposed to have children and therefore could remain free from the polluting aspects of birth; neither did they participate in ceremonies related to birth.

Davesh Soneji’s detailed account of the *devadasis* or *kalavantalu* (‘receptacles of the arts’) in the state of Andhra Pradesh, south India notes how these women, as ever-auspicious, considered themselves free from the ‘mundane and temporary forms of pollution such as those caused by menstruation and death’ (2004:42-43). They were able to enter the temple and to dance when they had their monthly cycle, as also when a family member died.

6.4:2 Menstruation

As has been stated, the biological fact of menstruation brings pollution, and yet, because it obviously heralds fertility, it is celebrated. The thirteen-year old daughter of a Tamil priest in one of the London temples, when asked if she had performed in the current year’s August chariot procession (2003) where the young pre-pubescent girls walk in front of the chariot, carrying pots with coconuts on their heads as a sign of auspiciousness, told me, ‘No, I’m a young woman now.’ She remarked on her dress that

evening, which was no longer a *chuddidar*, but a long skirt and a half-sari (*davni*). This indicated her new status. She then described to me rather proudly that she had gone to Sri Lanka for three weeks at the beginning of the year for her 'celebration'. 'My puberty ceremony' she then whispered, and added that she had loved the whole event (author's fieldnotes 14.9.03). It is an extremely important occasion in a Tamil girl's life, and the ceremony can continue for several days. The girl is first kept secluded, undertakes special bathing rituals, eats particular foods, and finally, with all the close family and other relatives, celebrates the 'attainment festivity' (*camattiya kaliyanam*, also *tirandukuli*, meaning 'bath after menarche'). The concluding day involves extensive and sometimes very costly preparations - feasting, decorations, an expensive new sari for the girl, gifts from all the relatives and even the hire of musicians for performance. In some parts of south India in earlier times, dance was included as part of the ceremonies, often performed by the temple *devadasis* (see Gaston 1996:35). Vasumathi Duvvery too has evidence from fieldwork with Tamil Brahmin women in south India in the 1980s of the performance of circular folk dances called *Kummi* at this menarche ceremony (1991:118).

As Pfaffenberger states:

It is one of the biggest events in the life cycle of a woman, and it both celebrates the attainment of reproductive power and invests her with the responsibility incumbent on one who is to bear the burden of the family's mystical welfare.

Pfaffenberger 1982:204

These separation rites for the menarche are found in many societies, particularly where female fertility is prized. Young girls in Eskimo communities in south-west Alaska are segregated from their friends and families for between four and forty days at the onset of their first menstruation (Morrow 2002); in east Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, menstrual huts are built for both the girls and menarche and menstruating women, where they will remain in segregation from the men for 4-5 days every month (Hoskins 2002; Stewart and Strathern 2002). In southern India, strict Brahmin households have a separate, small, darkened room especially for this purpose (*kuchil*). As Duvvury notes, 'in the case of Aiyar girls...the menarche ritual marks the separation of the girl from an asexual world and her incorporation into a sexual world' (1991:112). Duvvury describes too, how the older women sing songs that contain sexual jokes and teasing lyrics. Things

that cannot usually be said or alluded to (ie. sexual references) are common in the songs and the comments, allowing a temporary release from the usual restrictive behavioural codes of the women. It is also a way of educating and easing the young girl into her new role of a becoming a marriageable and therefore sexual being (ibid:217). The Gujaratis, however, do not celebrate their daughter's first menstruation, and Burghart records one Gujarati woman who was requested to celebrate this event with a Tamil friend and was somewhat embarrassed at the invitation (1987:224). The Gujaratis, however, celebrate the seventh month of pregnancy which the Tamils do not acknowledge.

Hindu views relating to menstruation and how it affects dance practices and performances are changing. The six main Gujarati dance teachers living and working in Leicester, indicated through questionnaires that menstruation was not a particularly significant factor to them. For performances and paid teaching it was of course considered necessary to honour obligations and contracts, so the possibility of abstaining from performing or teaching at certain times of the month was not an option. As one performer and teacher wrote, 'I cannot avoid it, so I just continue. If it is painful, I take painkillers'. Another did not consider menstruation had any effect on her dance performance at all. Two other performers and teachers stated that they would modify their performances, and not present a particular dance of a devotee at that time, or perform at religious functions where a deity was placed on the stage. One teacher suggested that it was fine to participate, but again in a modified manner, so that movements would be 'modest, and not too vigorous', and one younger performer stated rather positively, 'As long as you are ok physically, you can perform. I think we should be proud of being women and of our ability to create new life'.²⁴

In the London Tamil temples where dance is more in evidence, the situation is also undergoing modification, but still does appear to impact on the dance practices. This is because it is closely linked with the sacred space of the temples, and because of the Tamils' greater interest in ritual purity, especially for the women. On three occasions when I have attended the temples to see a dance performance, I have arrived to find that the presentation has been cancelled because the dancer has her period. Additionally,

whilst observing classes at the East Ham temple, on two separate occasions I have seen one or two of the girls sitting and watching class, taking notes and following the detail but without physically participating. They had their period and were not allowed to join in, but were still expected to attend class by observing. During one of the evenings of *Navratri*, the girls took *puja* in the temple after their dance performance and they and their parents were blessed by the priest. Their dance teacher was not present in the temple and later explained to me that she had her period. At the Wimbledon temple, the dance teacher stated that in her opinion, menstruation did not affect the dance classes, but that women still kept to the rule of not attending the temple during that time of the month, even for special festivals. 'You just miss them' she said (author's fieldnotes 4.3.02). It is quite naturally, a subject that the young girls are very aware of, and allude to easily and somewhat freely in their speech. On one day, when I had been watching dance classes, the young, pre-pubescent girls wished to show me inside the temple, and asked 'Have you been in the temple today?' I replied that I had not (I had not yet had time), and they immediately assumed that I could not on that day. Interestingly, at the same temple, one of the organisers gave a very different understanding of her attitude to menstruation. She explained that she has to be at the temple all the time, so there is no question of staying away. She attends, and carries out all her many responsibilities, but will not participate in the *puja* at that time. Her view was that according to Sai Baba, their particular Indian *guru*, what matters is the purity inside, that is, 'the condition of one's heart' (her words), and this is what she follows as guidance (interview 15.1.03).

Gaston (1996) addressed the question, 'Should a menstruating dancer dance?' in her enquiry to over two hundred Bharatanatyam dancers, teachers and scholars in India in the 1980s. She concluded:

In general, it appears that, in keeping with a general decline in religious taboos, abstention from dancing during menstrual period is no longer as widely practised as it was twenty years ago. This decline in the religious observance of a private function is in marked contrast to the increasingly overt demonstrations of religiosity on stage. The implications of menstrual impurity are still observed with regard to temples and religious rituals; elsewhere, pragmatism has taken over. While dancers, teachers and all connected with the dance recognize that a menstruating woman is unclean, a new set of rules have been devised.

Gaston 1996:327

This current ethnographic research has revealed that in the UK, almost twenty years after Gaston's work, the same changes are taking place, and there is evidence of a new set of rules regarding menstruation emerging. The pragmatic factors of living in the UK necessitate changes in lifestyle that may contradict strict Hindu ethical codes. One young married woman, interviewed at the ISKCON temple in Watford, north of London, spoke of how she is not supposed to cook at those times of the month. But here in Britain, she does not live with an extended family of mother-in-law, aunts and sisters, who would traditionally take over from each other when needed (author's fieldnotes 6.5.02). So the new situation has new rules, or perhaps more accurately, does not conform to the traditional constraints.²⁵

6.5 Gender considerations

Most Sri Lankan Tamil women, even if they have undertaken a full dance training, will not continue to perform dance when they are married, as it is not considered correct practice for a married woman to display her body in front of others. None of the Sri Lankan Tamil dance teachers interviewed for my research undertakes performances, and most of their students who have continued to train after they leave school have ceased to dance when they marry. There are one or two exceptions. The main reason it seems, even in today's more relaxed climate, is as a result of pressure from the husband or rest of the family whose views remain somewhat conservative, and occasionally from the woman herself who does not believe it is right. O'Shea expresses a similar point in describing the dance practices of the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto, Canada.

The Sri Lankan Tamil emigrant community of Toronto...generally identifies adult women in the dance field as 'teachers' rather than as 'dancers'. This protocol seems to be an association of dancers with 'public women' and a discomfort with 'family women' appearing onstage that endures among this community more than among Indians.

O'Shea 2001:59[n.1]

Gaston too underlines the point:

Bharata Natyam style ...has largely become an accomplishment for young ladies of reasonably wealthy families. These girls are usually discouraged from adopting the dance as a profession and in most cases their dancing careers are terminated at marriage.

Gaston 1990: 8

Notwithstanding, there remain a number of married professional Bharatanatyam performers and teachers active today in the UK, but the detail of their situations is outside the scope of this thesis. But the point needs to be made that this has an effect on the dance students in the Tamil schools and temples, who do not see role-models of adult Bharatanatyam performers. They therefore do not conceive of the dance as a professional option.

Further examination of movements allowable to the female body in the Tamil temples have revealed that men and women sit segregated, on different sides of the space, most usually with the women on the left and men on the right. If the temple space is small and very crowded, the women will sit at the front, and the men sit and stand at the back and the sides. If the devotees are prostrating themselves in front of a deity, the men will lie so that their full body is face down on the ground. One temple worshipper explained that there are eight points in the man's body that have to touch the floor for the bow (*astanga pranam*), and five for a woman's body, so she will kneel and just let her arms and head touch. This is so that the pelvis is kept away from the point of contact on the ground. Further more, as previously indicated, the stricter rules for the genders in the *Swaminarayan* Temples enforce the segregation of men and women, so in these temples, the women will sit at the very back for *satsanga*, not to be seen directly by the *Swamis*. The men and women also often meet separately for their own respective functions in the temple. Generally in all the temples, there is a larger number of women devotees than male, and the women are encouraged and allowed to participate in all matters related to the general worship (except, of course, if they are menstruating). Women have traditionally carried the responsibility for religious practice, both in the home and the temple. The worship, however, is always controlled and conducted by the male priests, and they remain the necessary intermediaries between the gods and the devotees.²⁶

Despite this obvious hierarchy, in Hinduism it is believed that the male principle and male energy is dependent on its association with the female principle and energy. This is reflected in the ordinary everyday world of social relations, where a man without a wife

is seen as 'socially incomplete' (Good 2000:276), and in the religious world of the priests and temple worship, as also in the world of the deities themselves. Priests in the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, south India are required to have wives, through which they can access *shakti* (divine power or energy). Without a living wife, their powers are greatly reduced (see Fuller 1975). The highly revered senior priest at the East Ham Murugan Temple is now no longer able to perform wedding ceremonies as he has been recently widowed. The enormous potential energy of a male divinity is only considered fully active when acting in conjunction with the power of a female deity. 'Thus, goddesses and women possess creative and fertile powers upon which gods and men depend to fulfil their destinies' (Good 2000: 276), it is commonly thought.

Chapter Five and this current chapter have examined the practice of the Hindu men devotees carrying *kavadi* at special Hindu festivals and its related factors of trance and possession, but it is worth revisiting here in relation to gender considerations. No women appear to carry the *kavadi* and therefore it is a gender-specific practice.²⁷ Reasons as to why this is the case are not easy to ascertain from the respondents who gave varied responses, although there are several possible explanations. Firstly, the act of carrying *kavadi* is to honour a male deity, Lord Murugan, and devotees embarking on this practice hope to be embodied, during their possession, by aspects of that deity. Murugan is thought to carry an invincible weapon, a lance, with which he overcomes demons, and he represents a type of warrior power, all of course, considered to be masculine qualities. The men devotees have their cheeks and sometimes tongues pierced with small lances (*vel*) as a tribute to him. Secondly, the physical difficulty of carrying the heavy weight of the *kavadi* (traditionally up to a shrine at the top of a steep hill) would be problematic for women. Lastly, Tamil women have to be protected by and be subject to male authority, with no real independence from their husbands. 'This also requires that they maintain a fairly low profile at public events' (Diesel 2003:45), and includes not drawing attention to their physical forms. In fact, it is as if the women do not need to be empowered by the deity, as they are thought to naturally embody divine, ie. *shakti* power and energy, as discussed above. The women do participate in this festival in their own way by carrying

pal kudam (pots full of milk) on their heads as an offering to Murugan. They will process to the temple with the men who carry *kavadi*.

Turning to the classical forms of Bharatanatyam and Kathak, the male dancer is more the exception than the rule, and certainly the majority of dancers in the UK, even today, are female. O'Shea notes that:

Traditionally, dance teachers and music conductors [nattuvanan]²⁸ were male members of *devadasi* families. Thus, a gendered division of labor existed between performance and teaching. Some of these men continued teaching into the twentieth century. However, many women of the new generation of dancers turned to teaching as well, thereby bringing together the previously separate roles of performer and instructor.

O'Shea 2004: endnote 5 (forthcoming)

The relatively unusual phenomenon of a male Bharatanatyam teacher, (although in 2003-4 there were several teaching and performing in London) has a significant impact in attracting young male students. One London-based professional male performer and teacher had at least seven young men training, and had also taught a young man who is now a professional dancer. The same of course applies to the classical style of Kathak. Dancer Akram Khan, when beginning his Kathak dance career nearly ten years ago spoke of the influence of other male dancers on him:

Actually, most of my own inspiration for dance has come from the great male dancers like Pandit Birju Maharaj, Pandit Durgalal and my guru, Shri Pratap Pawar. Witnessing a male dancer perform Kathak first created an urge in my mind and body to learn this dance style...I found it much easier to relate to a male performer, as a role model.

Khan 1996:4

At the Tamil Schools and temples where Bharatanatyam is taught (by female teachers), there were no boys studying dance seriously, and nor was the emphasis there on taking up dance professionally. I observed only one young boy of six in a beginner's class at the East Ham temple, and there has been in the last five years another boy who studied there until he went to university. Not only is dance not considered a real profession, but as it is unlikely to bring in a high level of earnings, it is certainly not encouraged for the boys. In Leicester, a Bharatanatyam teacher, Vaidehi Pancholi, taught a class composed of young girls plus one young boy, and Nilima Devi taught Kathak to a white, non-Asian

boy of fifteen. He was studying seriously by having private lessons, taking the Kathak exams and participating in performance. His elder brother also trained in Kathak with Devi. Devi also taught a twenty-year old Asian man, now a senior student, and who was fully committed to taking up a professional career. He spoke about the problems of earning even enough money to support himself, let alone a family. There was one other young Asian boy aged ten who attended Devi's group class with his sister. These boys taking classes in classical dance are the exception. Kumar Shaswat, a male Kathak teacher and performer, who runs his own school of dance and music in Leicester revealed when interviewed that in the past there had been a few boys learning Kathak in his school, but at present (in 2003) there is just one. This may also be due to the fact that, although Kathak dance is still taught at the school, Shaswat no longer teaches, preferring to concentrate his energies on music. He commented that a teacher has to put so much into the dance teaching, and there is very little reward (author's fieldnotes 11.7.03).

The Gujarati *Navratri* celebrations offer rich material for observations of the dancing male and female forms, particularly in the very varied events that take place in the present day in the UK. The *Garba* form, essentially a women's folk clapping dance and thought to represent the girl cow-herds (*gopis*) at play, is now performed by men and women alike in certain *Navratri* gatherings, whilst other events will remain entirely a female domain. The nine-day *Navratri* festival honours the female divine power, *Devi*, and the lyrics to the folk songs sung while the *Garba* is played extol the mother goddess and celebrate female fertility and power. At many traditional festivities, the space remains a purely female arena, where men are in a marginal position, present, but not participating. As discussed in Chapter Four, many of the older Asian Gujarati women prefer to attend a women's only function during *Navratri*, where they participate in the more traditional, quieter, and in their view, more religious, songs and movements.

When the men do play *Garba*, they do so by joining the circular lines of dancers in groups; this effectively means that there are lines of women, then a group of men in a line and so on. So in this folk form the men and women are not in fact playing together. Later in the evening, the *Raas* stick dances begin, and unless it is an all-women's

evening, the men will participate fully, as traditionally they are playing the role of the god Krishna, a male deity. Here, men and women play (dance) together in temporary partnership as the elongated circles move around. Observations of the large *Navratri* gathering at De Montfort Hall in Leicester revealed this to be a time when the young men could express their prowess, strength, energy, and creativity in making new steps, masculinity and individuality. Very often groups of men will move in the *Raas* in a small circle together, vying with each other to make higher jumps, faster turns, and harder hits with their sticks. Watching, one is struck by the sheer vitality and enjoyment that is created. It displays the energy and physical prowess shown by male dancers in Bollywood dance films – dance that is heavily influenced by folk forms such as the Punjabi *Bhangra* and stick dances such as *Raas*. At the women-only evenings where the men attend but do not play *Raas* or *Garba*, they participate in other aspects of the evening such as ticket payments at the door, organising the activities for the whole of the nine-day *Navratri* period, serving food at the end of the evening, and also providing security for the women. One male respondent told me, ‘We don’t join in the *Garba* much. It’s a sort of English thing. The men join in much more in India’ (author’s fieldnotes 28.10.01).

Children interviewed at Rushey Mead Secondary School in Leicester all agreed (boys included) that they love participating in the movements at *Navratri*, and one boy added that the stick forms were easy to learn and to ‘play’. Voluntary practices in the lunch hour for *Raas/Garba* held at Abbey Primary School, also in Leicester, for both boys and girls, were well and enthusiastically attended by both sexes. Girls and boys played the *Garba* together – some making up new steps, other older girls helping the younger ones to learn, and some organising the younger boys. Their male teacher joined in with all the movements, at times leading the movements, at times following the children.

These comments on gender issues arising from ethnographic fieldwork in the South Asian community may be viewed in the wider context of under-representation of males in the performing dance world in Britain, as well as an under-representation of dancers from

a range of cultures. These factors are commented on by Siddall in her Arts Council report (2001:34):

A critical shortage of male dancers has followed years of under-investment in dance in schools and vocational training provision. Recently, a production had to be cancelled when calls to 20 male dancers found that none of them were available for work.

Siddall 2001:24

6.6 Final considerations: the place of dance in Hindu worship

Some of the significant issues to emerge from the ethnographic fieldwork relate directly to the debate concerning the religiosity of South Asian dance seen contemporaneously in the UK. Perceptions of practitioners, students and teachers have been surveyed, and questions asked concerning the meaning of religion as it is expressed through the dance. It is seen that for many it remains an issue of consequence. The role of dance in the temple both in the past and present, and the importance of the temple's sacred space has been interrogated, revealing leading questions regarding the place, and receipt of performances in the temple. Here we find varying viewpoints; some respondents believing that dance in the temple is for the deities, others suggesting it is for the audience, and some concluding that it is for both. It is evident that these controversies form part of a fluid and transmuting scene that at this time, in the early years of the twenty-first century, is in a state of transition and reformulation.

Concepts of purity and pollution, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are an integral part of Hindu belief, and impact on dance practices in numerous ways. Trance dance, or dancing when possessed by a deity's force is a common occurrence, and directly relates to the ritual purity of the person possessed. Evidence of this has been found in the UK Hindu communities at festival times, as discussed. The polluting factor of menstruation has been noted as bearing consequences to the performance of dance within temples, but again, the attitudes held form a changing phenomenon as younger generations move away from the more orthodox rules of the religion.

The nature of dance practices and bodily praxis within the temples in relation to the male and female bodies has been considered and answers sought to questions of why some practices are gender-specific. The religious trance-dancing of *Kavadi* is performed only by men, yet there are very few men or boys learning specific dance styles such as Bharatanatyam or Kathak. More common now is the participation by Gujarati men in the annual *Navratri* celebrations, where folk dance forms appear to carry less of a social stigma. Despite the fact that *Garba* is fundamentally a female practice, both sexes ‘play’ with enthusiasm at the larger venues in Leicester, and the *Raas* stick dance provides an opportunity for the men to show their prowess in movement. The restrictions on the female body have been examined and considered in the light of seemingly contradictory views in relation to the exposure of the body and the focus of the gaze in Bollywood dance. Within the Sri Lankan Tamil community, the protection and restriction of the women is still evident, manifesting in the fact that few girls continue to dance after marriage, and that filmi or Bollywood dance is frowned upon.

It is not unproblematic to examine the factors concerning religion and dance, or for respondents to find difficulty in articulating what their faith or religion means to them in terms of movement, for this demands a level of communication and understanding that is not our usual, or everyday mode of exchange. Sociologists call this a problem in ‘indexicality’, referring to the amount of shared background knowledge necessary to understand a message (Agar 1996:58). Salman Rushdie, in an essay entitled *In God We Trust*, succinctly sums up this dilemma:

As for religion, my work, much of which has been concerned with India and Pakistan, has made it essential for me to confront the issue of religious faith. Even the form of my writing was affected. If one is to attempt honestly to describe reality as it experienced by religious people, for whom God is no symbol but an everyday fact, then the conventions of what is called realism are quite inadequate...A form must be created which allows the miraculous and the mundane to co-exist at the same level – as the same order of event. I found this to be essential even though I am not, myself, a religious man.
Rushdie 1992:376

Notes:

¹ *Talam* are the metal cymbals played to beat the foot rhythms in a Bharatanatyam performance by the *nattuvanar*, who also speaks the rhythmic syllables.

² This is a medieval manuscript which sets out rules and regulations for temple building.

³ See also the project carried out at *PRASADA*, (Practice, Research and Advancement in South Asian Design and Architecture), De Montfort University, Leicester, considering Indian classical dance and the Hindu temple. Some of the conclusions drawn from this innovative research stated that: 'Architecture and dance both have representational as well as abstract aspects. Indian classical dance can be a vehicle for narrative, its gestures codified for connotation of ideas or things or feelings... Hindu temple architecture, on one level, is perhaps the world's most representational architecture, not only for the stories and images that its walls display, but also for the representational origin of its formal vocabulary, based on an imagery of little buildings grouped together to make a heavenly palace. But the essence of each of the two art forms lies in underlying abstract patterns, expressed through bodily means...What we can say for certain is that sastric dance and temple architecture show their closest parallel in these underlying patterns, which in both cases are dynamic, unfolding in time and space.' Hardy and Lopez y Royo:2002 [Unpublished report]

⁴ A Bharatanatyam recital traditionally consists of the following items: *Alarippu* – a pure dance item that usually opens every performance. The title derives from the Telugu word *alarimpu*, meaning 'to decorate with flowers' and the Kannada words *alar* and *ippu* ('flower' and 'bringing down'). 'The dance shows the gradual flowering or opening out of the dancer's body in readiness for the recital which follows' (Singha and Massey 1967:39). *Jatiswaram*, another pure dance piece follows, which consists of a series of complex rhythm patterns known as *jatis*, and this is succeeded by the *Shabdam*, based on a devotional song and interpreted with *abhinaya*, or passages of mime interspersed with pure dance. The most complex and central item in the performance is the *Varnam*, which is also the most testing and most elaborate piece. It contains passage of alternating *abhinaya* in which the dancer may improvise the content of the song, and *nritta* (pure dance). The *Padam* is danced next, based always on a theme of love and almost entirely consisting of *abhinaya*; it is a slow piece, concentrating on the conveying of the words. The grand finale is the *Tillana*, a musical term indicating an eight-beat melody, which is a fast and dynamic piece displaying the complete form of Bharatanatyam in spectacular glory.

⁵ Sanskrit word for 'seeing'. As the camphor light is held up to the deity, the unblinking gaze falls upon the devotees. It is literally a 'seeing', and a 'being seen', and the contact is exchanged through the eyes. It is not just a passive receiving (see Eck 1998 and Fuller 1992).

⁶ Rukmini Devi, a high-class Brahmin, studied Bharatanatyam in the 1930s against strong opposition and later founded *Kalakshetra*, a residential dance school outside of Chennai, south India.

⁷ See also Allen's detailed discussion on Devi's motives for using the Nataraj icon on stage (1997) and Gaston's interviews with Bharatanatyam practitioners on the presence of icons for worship on stage (1996:315).

⁸ Meduri writes of the problematic tension between secularism and religiosity in South Asian dance in today's Indian society. Despite the dance form of Bharatanatyam emerging in Bharata's *Natyashastra* from his 'religious world view...India today is psychologically restless and far removed from Bharata's religious state of mind...Indian dance today, however, functions in a secular reality...Today's *bharatha natyam*, with its danced stories of God evoked in a secular

world, is analogous to a human being walking forward with his face turned backwards' (2001:105).

⁹ For further detail and debate on the role of the *devadasis*, see Fuller (1984), Kersenboom (1987, 1991) and Srinivasan (1983, 1985, 1988).

¹⁰ See Peterson's detailed analysis of the evolution of dance dramas in Tamil Nadu, south India where she references the performances from the mid-seventeenth century that took place in the temple precincts (1998:45)

¹¹ If we look to examples in the Roman Catholic church, the original performance of the Mass privileged the priest and his relationship with God, rather than the congregation. The priest recited the Mass in Latin, in a low murmur hardly heard by the attendees, and faced the altar with his back to the congregation. The priest was communing with God, rather than with the audience of worshippers, and remained in the reserved sanctuary space (the sacred space around the altar). This changed radically in 1963 with the Second Vatican Directive which brought a new theology of the Mass, offering a democratisation of the procedures of worship. Now the priest faced his audience, spoke to them in English, and was allowed to move out of the sanctuary to give communion. (Personal communication from Brendan McCarthy).

¹² This dancer has danced too in a church in Germany in 1999. The performance took place immediately after the Sunday service and was a collaborative work with a group of American contemporary dancers, titled *Dance of Hope*. She kept to her classical Odissi style, used part of the ancient text of the *Gita* and placed statues of Indian gods in the performing space, commenting that 'it was just like performing in a temple. The language of Odissi can express anything' (interview with author 16.10.01).

¹³ *Archanas* – personal prayers of devotees to the deity facilitated by the priests. A small payment of £1 or £2 is made and the priest recites the particular name, the family names and their horoscope signs together with prayers in Sanskrit in front of the deity and usually in the presence of the devotees.

¹⁴ It is worth quoting here from the Catholic *Canon Law Digest* (1975) which addresses the topic of 'Dancing and Worship' to indicate the wide disparity of views on dance within religious worship. This text describes dance in western culture as 'tied with love, with diversion, with profaneness, with unbridling of the senses: such dancing, in general, is not pure. For that reason it cannot be introduced into liturgical celebrations of any kind whatever: that would be to inject into the liturgy one of the most desacralized and desacralizing elements...' (originally printed in *Notitiae* 11, 1975:202-205 with an English translation in *The Canon Law Digest*, Vol.VIII, 1975:78-92). See www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_13 [accessed 28.4.05].

¹⁵ There are at least 108 *mudra* (hand gestures) used in temple ritual; many of these gestures correspond to the dance gestures.

¹⁶ There is now also a group of adults at the Shree Ghanapathy temple who are learning and performing these devotional hymns. A group of singers from this temple went to perform as part of the week-long ritual events at the London Sri Murugan temple during the consecration of their new temple in May 2005.

¹⁷ Michelson writes of this phenomenon too amongst the Lohana caste of UK Gujaratis, stating that 'the Lohanas are well known for their predisposition to become possessed...The possessions follow stylized patterns of bodily shaking...People of all castes like to attend religious functions where they suspect that a possession of this sort will occur' (1987:43).

¹⁸ According to Kane: 'The word *vrata*, derived from the root *vr* (to choose or to will), means...command or law, obedience or duty, religious or moral practices, religious worship or observance, sacred or solemn vows or undertakings, then any vow or pattern of conduct...Gradually, *vrata* came to be restricted to sacred vows and rules of conduct to be observed by a person as a member of a community or an as individual.' (1974, Vol.V, pt 1:5, 21).

¹⁹ Willford notes that more modern tunes which have originated from Tamil films are now being played for the dancing, and have become accepted as devotional songs. He adds that 'To some extent, the *Kavadi* dance itself has evolved to now include steps and gyrations from the popular India-produced films' (2002:260).

²⁰ Waghorne too writes of this in relation to the Highgatehill Murugan temple, calling it 'a sense of new security' and quotes one official from the temple saying, 'We are tolerated better now' (2004:203).

²¹ Gandhi called this caste *Harijans* (lit. 'the Lord's person), from *hari* – a name of Lord Vishnu, and *jana* – a person. They now call themselves *Dalits*.

²² Sri Lankan Tamil worship allows one special time when devotees can touch the deities. This is when a temple is consecrated and before the deities are fully installed. Devotees can apply oil to the as yet unsanctified stone images as part of their worship, a practice called *thaila-apiyangam*. Many hundreds of devotees participated in this ritual at consecration of the new London Sri Murugan temple the day before the *Mahakumbhabhisheka* in May 2005 (see also Waghorne 2004:222).

²³ *Prasada* ('grace sent down') – *Prasada* is usually considered to be food that has been offered to the deity and that is then imbued with divine power and grace, but it can in fact be any substance that has been sanctified by a deity. One informant spoke to me proudly of owning two saris that had been worn by one of the female deities at the Ealing temple, which had then been sold off by the priests. 'When you wear them, you partake of her special powers' she told me, and described them as *prasada* (author's fieldnotes 22.8.02).

²⁴ This information is taken from questionnaires sent out to the six main dancer/teachers in Leicester and from further discussion with them on these issues. Full results of the questionnaires are presented in Chapter Three and in Appendix 4.

²⁵ It is interesting to note here that Sujata Banerjee's recent work to apply the principles of sports science to the teaching and performing of Kathak deals with the aspect of menstruation only in terms of health. She agrees that special consideration should be given to the menstrual status of female dancers, but in may practice, this may simply mean to rest if necessary in class and that performances have to go on. However, she recommends that a proper fluid balance is maintained and that a check is made on proper nutritional intake in terms of iron and other minerals needed (personal communication, September 2005).

²⁶ The only exception to this rule discovered in the fieldwork was in the London ISKCON temple, where women more recently have been allowed to tend the deities. The woman I observed was non-Asian and clothed in a sari, and was attending to the icons at the shrine (author's fieldnotes 7.2.02).

²⁷ See Karin Kapadia's argument that Tamil men have to 'become female' in order to be possessed by the deity (Kapadia 2000).

²⁸ 'A *nattuvanar* conducts the musical orchestra that accompanies a dance performance and is traditionally also the dancer's mentor' (O'Shea, forthcoming:endnote 37).

CHAPTER SEVEN: Old Forms, New Models?

7.1 The Bollywood¹ film influence

Music and dance are a very strong part of our movies. It's intertwined, it's part of our storytelling. Very often our songs translate emotions, translate devotion, love, agony, pain, separation.

Raj, BBC 2 documentary *Bollywood Dancing* 22.10.03

I view Bollywood as an extremely threatening phenomenon. It may not be a corporation but a fantasy which is feeding a fantasy of diaspora abroad. In making films for the diaspora audience abroad that efface the multiculturalism in India, it is creating a fantasy Hindu India which is having huge repercussions back home.

Indian conference delegate, Ings 2003:13

The influence of Indian film dance on the dance practices of today's young Asian generation is substantial, as indicated in the evidence from fieldwork in Leicester and London. This is found not only in the British Asian diaspora, but confirmed too by Nandini Bhattacharya, writing in the United States of how 'at Indian public functions such as Diwali or India Day parades, Bollywood dance-style song-and-dance performances –especially by children –are consumed as 'desi' public culture' (2004:164). In recent years the Bollywood influence on western tastes and its acceptance as a new cultural form has been widely acknowledged. The London department store, Selfridges ran a themed display of 'opulent Bollywood paraphernalia' (Williamson 2002:22) in May 2002 where dance, music, fashion shows and film screenings were on offer. Bollywood films and dance were featured in London's *Evening Standard* weekly magazine (8.3.02) in an article entitled 'Bollywood Comes to Town' and subtitled 'Salaam Bombay! Get into Bollywood – it's London next obsession'. Channel Four too programmed a season of Bollywood films in 2003, followed by *Bollywood Star* (June 2004), a four-part series documenting the progress of twenty young aspiring British Asian actors auditioning for a starring part in a Bollywood film. BBC 2, in October 2003, ran an hour's documentary, *Bollywood Dancing*, and used a two-minute clip of

‘filmi’ or ‘Bollywood’ dance for one of its programme trailers. During this same period the London Victoria and Albert Museum mounted a highly successful exhibition of Indian Cinema Art, featuring Bollywood film imagery from 1947 to the present day, which explored the impact of popular culture and its representation of social events and cultural change.² A further example of this recent western flirtation with Indian popular culture was Andrew Lloyd Webber’s stage musical *Bombay Dreams*, which ‘deployed Bollywood dance’s carnivalesque musicality’ (Bhattacharya 2004:161). This show opened at London’s Apollo Victoria Theatre in July 2002 and was still successfully running over eighteen months later, with a transfer to Broadway during 2004.³

In recent years, Bollywood dance classes have sprung up all over London⁴, including within the programme of dance teacher-training at Sadler’s Wells Theatre. One relatively new enterprise in the UK, Bollywood dancer Honey Kalaria’s highly successful organisation *Diva Entertainment*, teaches Bollywood dance to over 1,000 students a week (figures in summer of 2004). It maintains a strong marketing and promotional thrust that includes a website and videos and DVDs for sale and its rationale frames Bollywood dance as a new form of exercise, appealing to those who wish to increase fitness and loose weight. Kalaria announces at the beginning of the video that it is

developed and designed to instantly improve your fitness levels and body shape, utilising ancient and modernised Indian dance techniques. The programme will help you increase your health and fitness levels, unleash an abundance of energy from within, develop flexibility and grace, increase stamina and endurance levels and strengthen your heart. This programme will help you lose weight and increase your metabolism, helping you burn off extra calories. All this while having fun.

Kalaria in *Bollywood Workout*, 2002

These claims clearly locate Bollywood dance not just as dance, but as a medium of health, fitness, sport, and pleasure and follow a recent trend of rising numbers of aerobic dance classes (Prickett 1997:202). The focus, as above, is on body shape, weight loss and external appearance rather than the attraction of the dance itself. Like aerobic or other exercise videos, these Bollywood dance tapes offer the chance for students ‘to perfect moves, increase stamina and confidence in private prior to placing themselves on display in the public sphere in a live class’ (ibid:205). They too offer accessibility without the long-term investment needed in learning a classical dance form.

India's film industry is now over one hundred years old, and produces the largest number of films in the world, estimated to be in the region of 850 -1000 films per year. These films play 'in more than 13,000 predominately urban cinemas, viewed by an average of eleven million people each day and [are] exported to about a hundred countries' (Mishra 2002:1). The main 'Bollywood' industry is centred in Bombay/Mumbai and has been variously termed 'Hindi cinema', 'Marsala Movies', 'Indian popular cinema', 'Bollywood' and 'Mumbai-ishstyle', with its 'winning formula for success...consisting of song, dance, spectacle, rhetoric and fantasy' (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998:15).⁵ In the first part of the new millennium, Bollywood films have achieved recognition and financial success in a more global market, when for example *Devdas* (2002) was not only screened at Cannes but also reached number five at the UK box office in its opening week, and *Lagaan* (2001) was nominated for an Oscar. Indian popular cinema incorporates a wide range of regional genres, such as Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam, all of which have a large export market to the Indian diaspora. Films are made in more than 20 languages, the four listed above and Hindi being the major ones. Distinction is made here too between the art films of Bengali directors such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen who pioneered and perfected a style of artistic cinema that contrasts directly with the popular, melodramatic and fantastical genre known since the 1980s as 'Bollywood' (see too Grau 2002: 71-75).

Bollywood films reflect the fact that Indian performative traditions both sacred and secular draw heavily on practices of song and dance, and that music and dance have always played an integral part in Indian daily life. In these films, music and dance are an essential element in the intensifying of the emotional content of the story, and often feature every twenty minutes or so in a three hour long film.

Songs are sung usually by the hero and heroine, possibly the vamp... Songs fulfil several important functions, including advancing the narrative, by setting the scene for future action or enacting crucial turning-points in the narrative. They also allow things to be said which cannot be said elsewhere, often to admit love to the beloved, to reveal inner feelings, to make the hero/heroine realize that he/she is in love. Many songs are presented as dance routines, which vary from models based on classical Indian dance (mostly Bharatanatyam and Kathak forms), to folk dance, to the latest American styles.

Dwyer 2000:113

The skilful blending of many varied elements – comedy, song and dance, romance, villainy, morality - creates a unique category of film that appeals to a globalised Indian (and western) audience. As it is a highly censored genre of film allowing no overt sexual contact on screen, dance and song have become the vehicles for generating moods and fantasies of eroticism and sexuality. Rachel Dwyer confirms that ‘some types of songs, usually in conjunction with dance, present the body as a spectacle allowing for erotic display’ (ibid:114). Highly charged emotional scenes between the hero and heroine make use of various devices to create and relieve the sexual tension, including provocative body language in the dance sequences, the famous ‘wet-sari’ motifs, the imagery implicit in shots of fountains exploding into life, and dream sequences that imply more than what is explicitly shown. The innuendo and double entendres in the songs are evidence of a highly codified implicit sexual ingredient, most famously depicted in Subash Ghat’s film *Khal Nayak* (1993) in which the heroine dances to a song, ‘What’s behind the blouse?’ On an obvious level the answer is - her heart - but the carefully manipulated shots of the actress’s clothing and dance movements ensure that the audience (including the male audience in the film) do not misunderstand the double layer of meaning. Indian psychotherapist Udayan Patel comments how the ‘wet-sari’ dance numbers ‘all suggest overt sexuality...So sexuality is expressed through dance and the movement of the body drenched by water’ (Kabir 2001:197-198).

During the dance sequences, the viewer’s gaze is directed frequently to the lips, eyes, breasts and pelvis of the female dancers’ bodies, through the use of specifically choreographed movements and the direction of the camera views.⁶ Shots are angled from above to show more cleavage, or from below to emphasise the pelvic movements in the dance. These pelvic thrusts are familiarly known as *jhatkas* and *matkas*.⁷ Make-up to enhance the cleavage, push-up bras and padding of the hips and breasts⁸ are commonly employed to enhance this selective gaze. Laura Mulvey’s important analysis problematising the voyeuristic nature of cinematography (1975) confirms the notion of the scopophilic gaze⁹, as indicated here. The controlled and directed looking at the female forms, portrayed in this way, becomes a source of erotic pleasure. Indian actor Jaaved Jaaferi comments:

The audience in a cinema hall is divided into different sections: front benches, the stalls and the balcony. The front benchers are people who sit right in the front and go more for the crude stuff, double-meaning dialogues, cat-calling at vulgar movements, thrusting movements of the heroine.

Jaaferi, interviewed in Kabir 2001:209-210

In addition to the gaze of the predominately male audience in the Indian cinema, there is too the gaze of the male audiences in the film, particularly during the female dance sequences. Thus the woman becomes a locus of sensuality, an 'object of both the camera's gaze and the gaze of men within the narrative' (Derné 2000:147; see also Nair 2002). Derné suggests that this 'controlling gaze is an important component of male power in India' (ibid:149), reflected also in the male domination of the film industry and in the film narratives that are monopolised by men's stories. In this male world, women's parts exist only in relation to the men and thereby confirm the woman's subordinate position in Indian society.

The dance and song sequences are an essential element of a Bollywood film, and the popularity of a certain song will guarantee the film's success. Songs are played and replayed endlessly before a film's release, ensuring the presence of a large audience when the film opens. Anu Malik, a film music writer interviewed by Nasreen Munni Kabir (2001: 186) describes how this works:

What happens is that people listen to the audio track, either on cassettes or on the radio, or they see the song clip on television...After they hear the music, they form an opinion about the film; if they like the music, the film is assured of a very good opening, and if, God forbid, they don't like the music, well, all hell breaks loose, because the financiers, the producers and the distributors are worried, and the stars are worried, because there is a possibility the film may not open well.

Malik, interviewed in Kabir 2001:186-187

The songs and dances also provide a 'repeat' value once the film has opened, bringing the audience back time and time again just to watch their favourite ones. Song and dance numbers are now more commonly recorded separately from the rest of the film, using professional 'playback'¹⁰ singers and demanding significant financial commitments for their creation. Some producers spend at least forty per cent of their total budget on recording the songs and dances and an average of £33,000 per song item is not uncommon.¹¹ This is hardly surprising when a spectacular and lavish song in *Devdas*

needed fifteen days rehearsal for eighty dancers, followed by twelve days of shooting (Chopra 2003). The effect of this has been to create stars of the choreographers, who are highly sought after and whose earning potential has soared. Although there are 110 registered Bollywood choreographers, 'the handful of leading choreographers have creative control of 300 to 400 songs between them at any given time' (ibid:32), and have created their own type of sub-industry within the filmmaking business.

As far back as the 1940s, dance in film was developing its own hybrid style, using a melange of folk elements and music from all parts of India (including the lively Punjabi *Bhangra* dance and music), and components from the classical styles of Bharatanatyam and Kathak, and what was then called 'cabaret dancing'. The need in film for a more entertaining, more sensual form of dance than the traditional classical styles was expressed by the well-known Bollywood choreographer Saroj Khan¹² in a BBC 2 documentary. She commented:

Film dances must entertain audiences of many thousands at a time. Film dances must please everyone. You can't have a dancer standing stiffly and moving her neck [she demonstrates] because audiences know nothing about classical dance forms- Kathak and Bharatanatyam...They see Raveena's sexy dance number, 'Ek do tin' and the film is a hit...People want this, they want those tantalising moments.

Khan, BBC 2 documentary *Bollywood Dancing* 22.10.03

Despite the popularity of the hybrid, sensuous style, classical dance artists too are commissioned to make dances for Bollywood films, as exemplified in the use of legendary dancer and teacher Pandit Birju Maharaj's Kathak choreography for several of the dance numbers in *Devdas*, and many of today's film stars have had extensive training in either Kathak or Bharatanatyam. Today's Bollywood style will incorporate jazz, street dance and hip-hop phrases, blended together with melodramatic facial expressions and extensive use of mime to convey the meanings in the song. Arundhati Subramaniam, emphasising the latest influences on the dance, writes that an 'upsurge of bhangra-pop, dandiya-jazz, disco-kathak, even kalari-breakdance syntheses also epitomize an ethos of conscious cultural hybridization' (2003:136). The film dancing calls from the actors and specialist dancers a high level of performance skill, versatility, energy and dynamism in executing the often complex and focused choreography, although Sherril Dodds argues

that this type of film dance may be highly fabricated (2001:34). The dances are frequently shot in short 'takes', deleting all signs of breathlessness and sweat as the dancers have time to catch their breath and have their make-up and hair retouched. An illusion of energy may also be created. Buckland, discussing the dance content of pop music videos, notes that:

Codified movement is regarded as one complementary element in the communication of that overall aim, working conjunctively with the other expressive systems of sound, word and visuals in the formulation of a clear narrative.

Buckland 1993:74

In Bollywood dance films, the actions of the dancers are not only explicitly conveying the words, but as in pop videos, they are created to reflect key musical structures (Dodds 2001:55). The similarities of dance techniques in pop videos, Bollywood films and popular musical theatre can be noted here where the emphasis is on the congruency of bodily movement and the words being conveyed. Formulaic storytelling is the essence of the Hindi film, and the songs and dances are the natural mode of articulation for these stories.

7.2 Bollywood dance in Leicester and London

Oral history records of the Asian community in Leicester reveal that in the 1960s when the first cultural centres were being established in what was then a relatively small community, the only Asian entertainment available was the Hindi movie. Every weekend, Asian people would flock to see the two or three films being shown, seeking both company and exposure to culture. 'That's all we had...the only art we saw was on the cinema screen' (Hyde et al 1996:8). This was the case for most newly established Asian communities in the UK at that time, as noted by Gillespie in her study of the audio-visual culture in Asian families in Southall, London (Gillespie 1989:227). The arrival of the VCR in the late 1970s had a transformative impact on the cultural lives of the Asian immigrant communities; instead of the weekend outings to the cinema, a choice of Hindi movies was now accessible at any time in the home, and much family time was and continues to be invested in it. Studies in the 1980s show that ownership of a home video was twice as high in Asian households than any other (ibid). Further investigations in the 1980s and early 1990s indicated that the influence of film through the medium of the

home VCR had become a major factor in the changes in cultural transmission, home movie watching in the diasporic situation becoming the chief player in children's absorption of traditional stories and facets of Indian life (see Jackson and Nesbitt 1993; Nesbitt 1994; Sharma 1983). During their ethnographic study of Hindu children across the UK, Jackson and Nesbitt discovered that the learning of stories from parents and grandparents had been taken over by the Hindi film, and that

in cases where film was reinforced by other channels of cultural transmission –such as a school assembly, a festival celebration, a parent's account or by reading a library book – the children's grasp of a story was surest.

Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:135

The showing of films in the home is not always of the Bollywood 'escapist' genre; many families will watch religious films (commercially available and often featuring the family's particular *guru* or of the religious movement to which they belong), and videos of family weddings, events and festivals in India, so providing an effective means of a link with the past and with their roots, and of reinforcing their 'distinctive sense of identity' (Nesbitt 1994:135). It also increases exposure to Indian languages, mainly Hindi, but also to Gujarati, Tamil and Bengali through films made in these languages. It is certainly time regarded by the parents as positive for all the above reasons and because the time invested in watching is commonly with the whole family, thereby strengthening family ties. Jackson and Nesbitt also comment that as the medium is a relatively modern technology, children view it more positively and are more 'predisposed to the material which it records and relays' (1993:137) – an added bonus in terms of cultural transmission. They add that 'It seems likely that because of video children are more able to reconcile Hindu mythology with contemporary, secular society than they would otherwise be' (ibid).¹³

The exposure to Indian films and its implications on religious, socio-cultural and linguistic life emphasises the need for investigation of this medium in relation to dance practices in present day Asian life in the UK. Part of Jackson and Nesbitt's research, carried out in Coventry, revealed very little formal teaching of the classical styles of South Asian dance, so there was a greater reliance on the transmission of dance through

film (ibid 1993:143). As videos can be played and replayed, dance moves can be practised and perfected through repeated viewing, or improvised within a base of the 'copied' movement vocabulary.¹⁴

My research in Leicester has revealed the huge impact of film (or 'filmi') dance on the current learning and teaching of South Asian dance in the community. The dance teachers interviewed speak of the changes they have observed over the last ten years as audio-visual culture has come to dominate the musical and dance expression. One teacher complained of the lack of interest in classical styles, and that she felt she had to compromise by teaching filmi dance; 'the majority of interest is in fast, instant results and Bollywood favourites' she added (questionnaire June 2003: Appendix 4). In a further semi-formal interview, this respondent described a commonly held perception by Asian people in Leicester that dance teaching or performing is not a profession, and as everyone saw it on videos, anyone can teach it. 'Even the dinner ladies in one school were teaching dance!' she complained (author's fieldnotes 18.2.02). Her years of training, and experience in dance teaching, she thought, were being undervalued:

I believe traditional dances are becoming outdated except for the Navratri festival. The craze for modern popularity will keep growing because the parents support this... Unless the senior tutors like me keep up with the hip-hop etc. styles, we will be teaching and performing less and less.

Leicester dance teacher, questionnaire June 2003

A Leicester-based Gujarati Kathak teacher, born and trained in dance in India and who only teaches classical dance, argued that the Gujarati community in Leicester does not have the education or background to be able to discern the difference between classical dance and the hybrid Bollywood style. One of her colleagues, a Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher, described having to change her style of teaching, 'not completely but to a certain extent because of more interest in Bollywood style' (questionnaire June 2003), and she noted too the desire in the students to learn dances quickly to be able to perform. This had become the students' main aim. She was also concerned about the lack of understanding of the different dance styles. In a later interview, this teacher described how ten years ago all the girls had wanted to learn Bharatanatyam, but during the last three years their preference had shifted to Bollywood dance. Her girls' group is often

invited to perform film dances for weddings, parties, clubs and discos but she does not allow it as she feels that dance is not just for 'light' entertainment. She will now only dance herself at religious functions (author's fieldnotes 12.7.02).

7.3 Issues of authenticity, control and authority

The impact of the Bollywood dance style on the transmission of South Asian dance has its parallels in the realm of traditional Irish dance where the phenomenon of the globalised theatrical show of *Riverdance* has forced a change in pedagogic styles of delivery. Since the mid-1990s, demand has been made by the younger generation of students to be taught the 'Riverdance' style, fuelled by ambitions to audition for the several global productions of *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*. This style, created by Irish-Americans Michael Flatley and Jean Butler, emphasised the jumps, greater elevation of the steps, heel clicking, and the use of the arms, in direct contrast to the held upper body and arms of the traditional form. New innovations also included a more extravagant use of space and a more intricate and ornamented style of footwork (Brennan 1999). Elements from traditional Irish dance were blended with other dance vocabularies,

such as stylized Western balletic or theatrical walks, hands on hips movements, and eye and hand contact made in a theatrical way. The Irish step dancers were suddenly required to move in a theatrical manner previously not expected of them...The dancers who auditioned for these parts in the Irish step-dance schools had to be hard-hitting, fast, and precise, so that their performance would lend themselves to a spectacularly visual theatrical experience.

Foley 2001:39-40

Catherine Foley, in her discussion of the local and global perceptions of Irish dance asks whether *Riverdance* might be a model for the appropriation of dance cultures elsewhere, suggesting how its globalised success and powerful drawing force for young dancers, choreographers, musicians, could be seen in other dance genres. Susan Brennan (1999) notes how registration in Irish dance schools doubled after the appearance of shows like *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*. Certainly its 'spectacular popularity' (ibid:34) as a cultural commodity promoting Irish culture and nationality has been unsurpassed. It is a question that too may be interrogated in relation to the influence of Bollywood dance on

South Asian dance forms and popular culture in the world-wide Indian diaspora, an influence which has yet to be fully researched and quantified.

In relation to South Asian styles, there appear to be several contributory factors to the changing perceptions of classical and Bollywood dance forms. One is, without doubt, the powerful presence of the global Bollywood film as a fashion icon and with trend-setting status, popular not only within the Asian diaspora, but also appealing to main-stream consumer taste. Secondly, there is a view, held both within the Gujarati community and by those outside it of a caste/class distinction relating to background and education in terms of knowledge of classical forms of music and dance. Asians from India will say (about the East African Gujarati community in Leicester) 'Oh, they're from Africa. They're just businessmen and do not know about classical music' (author's fieldnotes 11.7.03). Another respondent, a Gujarati resident in Leicester who left Kenya in 1968 and who now promotes classical music concerts, said that the problems in getting audiences to these concerts in Leicester is that the heart of the community, because of its roots, is a folk community. He explained further that despite their business acumen and prowess, their background is in agriculture and artisan work, and therefore classical forms of music and dance are not really appreciated - 'they have a folk mentality' (author's fieldnotes 11.7.03). Thirdly, as the younger generations integrate more into non-Asian life, the traditional values promoted by the study of artistic classical forms may become less appealing as a more independent level of thinking is pursued. What they perceive as an up-beat, energetic and more sensual form of dance is perhaps more attractive to them. One young, London-based Bharatanatyam teacher, however, expressed her positive attitude to film dance, saying, 'We have to thank Bollywood for re-awakening the spirit of dance – at least it makes people get up and dance!' (Chatterjee 2004:15). Indeed, the SADiB report noted the extensive influence of filmi dance on many of the dancers interviewed for the project, 'from pure classicists like Sonia Sabri and Mavin Khoo to Bhangra dancers, and inevitably by individuals such as *filmi* dancer Rakhi Sood' (Grau 2002:72).

The powerful appeal of the filmi dance genre is revealed distinctly in Leicester's annual Asian *Mela*¹⁵ Festival, a two-day event in July which attracts thousands of visitors from all over the Midlands. The festival started life as the Belgrave Carnival in 1983, and is now said to be one of the largest Asian cultural festivals in the country. As a community festival it offers workshops in arts and crafts, information stalls on local community and council groups, fashion shows, food and its main attraction, two large stages for continuous music and dance displays which are usually fully booked five months in advance of the *Mela*. The performances are mostly by groups of young girls, ranging from 6 and 7 years old to teenagers and young women, some of whom attend local dance groups. The younger ones learn and practise with their mothers or dance teachers, and are taught a simple sequence of moves to the words of a film song. They dress in Punjabi outfits (long tops over full trousers) or in the more traditional Gujarati *chaniyo*. The older girls often choreograph their own dance sequences which tend to be more sensual in terms of their movement vocabulary and more revealing in terms of dress (tight-fitting black trousers and skimpy, glittery tops, for example). They too create their dance moves to mime to the words of a film song. I spoke to one teenage group performing at the *Mela* in July 2003 at rehearsal the evening before. Their hair was braided and they spoke of having special make-up planned for the occasion. As they practised that evening (to loud recorded film music with a heavy beat), the local TV filmed and interviewed them. For a short while and on a small scale they enjoyed playing the part of Leicester celebrities – the local face of a global phenomenon. [See accompanying DVD Track 7 for film excerpts of Bollywood dance performed by these girls and by the dancer described below.]

In July 2002, I filmed two sisters aged 12 and 17 dancing both duets and solo pieces on stage in one of the smaller tents. Neither sister had taken formal dance training¹⁶, choreographing their own dances with their mother's help. Amisha, the elder, dancing since the age of three, created her dance movements to convey the words of the film song. Her performance was extremely energetic, confident and alluring, all the hallmarks of film dance style. Her first item began facing the back of the stage, moving her pelvis from side to side before dramatically spinning round to face the audience, hands on

hips, and fixing them with a knowing stare. She was costumed in full, side-split-open hipster trousers with a short tight blouse top and bare midriff. In a later interview, Amisha spoke of her desire to work in Bollywood films. She was asked frequently to perform at various functions in the Midlands area, and was encouraged in this by her proud parents (author's fieldnotes 13.7.02). The family are involved with the Sri Ram Krishna Temple in Loughborough, near Leicester, and Amisha's mother runs the youth centre attached to the temple. In contrast to this, at the Sri Sanatan Temple in Leicester, the woman training the young girls in dance for the annual *Raas Garba* competition told me that she would teach them Bollywood style, but she is very careful to remind them 'not to flaunt their bodies' and that they would only use 'good' songs, meaning words with a religious content (author's fieldnotes 28.7.03).

One of my first fieldwork visits was to a predominately Guyanese Hindu temple in south-east London, where I had been invited to watch a programme of dances for a special occasion. All the performers were young girls, and although they were announced as performing classical Bharatanatyam and Kathak, the forms I saw were clearly a choreographic mixture of classical and 'creative dance', and somewhat reminiscent of dance in films. The dancers were accompanied by audiotapes of loud film music. Interestingly, both the audience's and performers' perceptions of this dance were that this was 'classical', indicating the distinction of levels of knowledge and understanding already cited. This temple congregation did not perceive difference between traditionally classical styles and the more hybrid, 'creative' or filmic forms. In a later conversation with a young trainee priest at the temple, he offered his view that the dance that takes place in the temple must be *sattvic* (pure, true), and that there should never be any 'vulgar' dance (his words), echoing perhaps the earlier comments of the teacher at the Sri Sanatan Temple. Clearly there was a difference in perception of both our views on the dance forms, and he saw no contradiction in what was being performed and his principles for the temple. At the rather stricter *Swaminarayan* Temple in Neasden, north-west London, where the sexes are segregated, one of my informants told me that 'filmi dance is not encouraged at the temple – it's about attracting the opposite sex, which is not part of temple culture' (author's fieldnotes 19.10.02).

Traditional opinions maintained by the older generations and by the more religious devotees in both groups of Gujarat and Tamil Hindus are discouraging of overtly sensual dance epitomised by Bollywood films. This view too is maintained by many of the classical dance teachers in Leicester and London. Yet it remains a multi-layered picture, as judgements regarding the type and quality of dance are manifold with many differences of opinion as to what type of dance can be categorised as ‘filmi’ and what constitutes a classical form.

As noted in Chapter Five, young Tamil girls in London learning Bharatanatyam admitted to me (in quiet voices so their teacher could not hear), that they loved Bollywood dance and practised it at home and at school whenever they could. All the Tamil Bharatanatyam teachers interviewed had no time for film dance and were not interested in discussing it at all. Perhaps it is the equivalent of asking certain traditional classical ballet teachers whether they are interested in disco dance. The fact too that the movements in film dance encourage the gaze directly on the female body, and predominately to the breasts and pelvic area would not be acceptable to a strict Tamil Hindu. The chastity and purity of the female (as well as of the Tamil language) has held great importance in Tamil civilisation. As Pandian notes:

The loss of purity/chastity of the language is analogous to the loss of purity/chastity of Tamil womanhood, and such a loss would result in the loss of sacredness or spirituality of the household and ultimately the Tamil country.
Pandian 1987:49

According to Tamil religious thought, the female power is both dangerous and benevolent, and therefore has to be protected and controlled by the male force, through husbands, fathers, brothers or sons. When protected, ‘she becomes the source of blessings and good fortune’ (Taylor 1991:210); if not, it is believed shame, dishonour and misfortune will visit her family. Floya Anthias, discussing the gender rules pertaining to diaspora contexts, speaks of how women are seen often as mainly responsible for the domestic domain, and are endowed with ‘a particular burden of “femininity”’ (1998:565). Hence, as discussed in Chapter Five, it is the dance form of Bharatanatyam (rather than filmi dance) that has become a Tamil identity marker for immigrant communities because

it is thought to embody the very feminine characteristics of purity, chastity, obedience, dignity, virtuousness, and a middle-class respectability.

These notions too indicate the inter-relatedness of the social body of society and the control of the individuals' physical bodies, as Douglas points out, 'The body communicates information for and from the social system in which it is a part' (1975:83). The social, cultural and religious mores of the Tamils are inscribed on the bodies of their community, and in this case, particularly the female ones. Discipline and control of the body is used as an aspect of an ascetic, religious code, where the body is subordinated to 'higher' spiritual ends, akin to Christian tradition and other religious discourse where the aesthetics of the soul rather than the body are glorified (Featherstone 1991).

There is a further layer of this contested discourse to be unravelled in relation to the perceptions of filmic dance and the strict preservation of classical Bharatanatyam in the immigrant Tamil community. Most of the dance teachers I observed in London taught Kalakshetra-style Bharatanatyam, holding it in high regard for its purity and refinement of line. Indeed, when I visited one Tamil Sunday School, on entering the class and after announcing my name, the teacher added with great emphasis, 'This lady has been to Kalakshetra, so she knows how well or not you are dancing' (author's fieldnotes 8.11.03). Much has been written about the appropriation of the Bharatanatyam dance form made by Rukmini Devi, the founder of Kalakshetra, in particular the purging of movements and songs that depicted certain types of *shringara* (amorous love, sexuality and eroticism) as well as the removal of hip movements and position taken from the original temple dance sculptures (Coorlawala 2004:56).¹⁷ In this light it is perhaps not so surprising that Bollywood film dance is disregarded by these Kalakshetra-trained teachers.

Western dance history offers too, binary concepts of 'proper/improper', 'pure/impure'. The early nineteenth century view of the waltz considered it 'too sexually dangerous for "respectable" women in Europe and North America' (Desmond 1997:32), and dancing

manuals emphasised the proper and correct ways of the deportment of the body, as well as the holding of a partner. These emphases reveal, Desmond notes,

socially constituted and historically specific attitudes toward the body in general, toward specific social groups' usage of the body in particular, and about the relationships among variously marked bodies, as well as social attitudes toward the use of space and time.

Desmond 1997:32

They too reveal the hegemonic appropriation of a dance style by the middle and upper classes, found too, for example in the cleaning up of the social dances *Turkey Trot* and *Tango* by Vernon and Irene Castle in the early twentieth century, to provide respectability and the elegance for their white, middle-class clientele. All embodied references to the dances' lower-class Black roots were tidied up and 'whitened' (ibid:34), a move echoed in Devi's attitude and approach to the teaching and performing of Bharatanatyam.

There still persist notions of the ideal or purest form of movement and the purity held by the embodied form of the dancer in other dance forms, notably ballet. Geraldine Morris states how in ballet training manuals up to this day 'instructions and definitions are presented as autonomous, impersonal prescriptions for executing ballet's codified steps "correctly"' (2003:19), a view also upheld by Susan Leigh Foster in her work examining the conceptual construction of the dancing body. Foster writes how during regular class training, as dance 'students learn to duplicate the correctly demonstrative body and to avoid the mistakes of the incorrect body, they present (and are presented with) endless new variations on right and wrong' (Foster 1997:238). The unrelenting demands of the system ensure that students control and mould their bodies to fit the ideal image, and in this way, the 'correct' movements, patterns, postures and kinetic nuances are inscribed into the dancers' bodies.¹⁸ Control, authority and authenticity speak through the hidden discourse of ballet pedagogy, couched in the ideals of a 'pure line', a 'lifted, extended body', a 'delicacy and lightness of step', a 'good turnout' – all expected aesthetic qualities in the production of a balletic dancing body.

Issues of control, authority and authenticity and the appropriation of a particular dance form to create a certain 'pure' aesthetic can be found too in the practices of Irish dancing

(Hall 1996). The uniqueness of the carriage of the upper body in Irish step-dancing – still and straight whilst the legs perform intricate steps, jumps and kicks – is held up to be a factor of ‘good bearing’ by the examiners and teachers controlling the transmission of this nationalised dance form. Due to the powerful mechanism of competition and its standardisation processes, regional variations in performance have been excluded and the dancing form homogenised, with the characteristic ‘held’, erect posture of the upper body dominating the form. Through this control, a narrowing of style takes place. Frank Hall suggests that these qualities are promoted as they accord with ‘the values that enhance its [Irish dance] status as a symbol of the Irish nation’ (ibid:262). Hall continues the argument by stating how this control over the dancing body is used.

In one way of looking at things, the control of the body is meant to be a positive political signification of Irish culture. In this scenario, Irish selves control their bodies as a positive representation of their own Irishness...The nationalist selection for good bearing also adopts (and adapts) this bodily self control for its own aesthetic and political ends.

Hall 1996:263, 265

7.4 Transmission, innovation and change

Dance changes as communities change. And tradition is the process by which communities strike a balance, attempting to create vernacular dances that manage simultaneously to keep faith with the past and to reflect current beliefs and needs...Tradition involves conservation and invention, change and creativity (both individually and group), and continuity.

Spalding and Woodside 1995:252

How, where and why dance is taught to the younger generation of South Asian communities in the UK has been part of the focus of this research in seeking to examine changing patterns of cultural identity and perceptions of that identity. As already argued, dance has been found to be an integral part of the process of establishing roots for the immigrant elders, keen to strengthen their cultural heritage outside of India or Sri Lanka. Jean Cunningham writes of her study of a school of Indian classical dance in Vancouver, Canada, that ‘cultural continuity is important to this group of first-generation South Asians. Significantly as well is a classic form of aesthetic inheritance...’ (1998:287)

Observation from fieldwork has revealed obvious differences in methods of transmission of South Asian dance in the UK in relation to the pedagogic styles that take place in India (or Sri Lanka). There are too distinctions in ways of teaching between the professional dancers/teachers in Britain, and those working within the temples, Tamil schools and community groups here. These I will go on to examine. One major factor in Britain facing many teachers of South Asian dance is that students are in an environment which lacks a familiarity with cultural, musical and spiritual roots, yet as Prickett points out in her research into the ISTD South Asian dance syllabus, ‘the demands of the form...require familiarity with elements of the culture, its literature, music and religious/spiritual systems’ (2004:7). Some of the syllabi taught here in the UK (including the ISTD ones) specifically attempt to address this lack.¹⁹

The relatively new ISTD South Asian dance syllabus is used by many of the professional teachers in the UK, and indeed, several were instrumental in its conception and manifestation. In Leicester for example, Nilima Devi, a professional Kathak dancer and teacher now uses the ISTD system, although when she began her school in 1981 she worked with her own self-designed six-year diploma course. She ran this in conjunction with the *Prayag Sangit Samiti* Junior Diploma for the younger students. But the Indian syllabus was difficult to follow given the short time spent in lessons in the UK, and her own diploma, although successful, was expensive to run as musicians and examiners had to be brought over from India for the exams. Devi has found the ISTD syllabus more adapted to methods of teaching in the UK, but still has some difficulties in that it appears, to her, to be too orientated towards performance. In Kathak, by Grades 2 and 3 the students are expected to work with musicians and this again has proved to be too costly (personal communication 8.2.04).

Nayana Whittaker, in Leicester, another professional dancer and teacher, takes her students through the ISTD Kathak exams, as does one of the non-professional Bharatanatyam teachers. Another Bharatanatyam non-professional teacher continues to use the Indian *Prayag Sangit Samiti* exams. Two teachers do not use any system of examination – one focuses on performance-based work, the other on folk dance, and

Kumar Shaswat, who runs a school of music and dance, has created his own internal exams. Those who do use an exam system find it valuable as a spur for the children to work, and to provide paper certification to the parents, keen for their children to acquire bona fide credentials.

Where Bharatanatyam dance is taught in temples and Tamil schools within the Sri Lankan community in London (and Greater London) by non-professional teachers, two systems of examination are employed.²⁰ As detailed in Chapter Five, one system set up in 1990 is the *Academy of Fine Arts, London* with codified grades for both music and dance. Running parallel to this (and established at about the same time) is the system of the *Oriental Fine Arts Academy, London* (OFAAL) with a similar number of grades for both subjects. What is significant about these two systems is they have been founded exclusively for the Tamil community and maintain Tamil identity by encouraging the teaching and examining to be conducted in Tamil. The syllabus books are printed in both Tamil and English, the teachers use a mixture of Tamil and English whilst teaching, and the theoretical written exams can be taken in either language. As Gorringer remarks:

The option to offer the OFAAL examinations in Tamil, makes a strong and positive statement about the role the arts undoubtedly have in nurturing and developing a sense of pride in cultural identity.

Gorringer 2003:13

During her fieldwork visits to Tamil schools in London for the SADiB research, Gorringer discovered that the Sri Lankan Tamil dance teachers had not heard of the ISTD exams. She described the atmosphere in the Sri Lankan Tamil schools with regard to dance practices:

They operate in their own sphere, where they all know what the others are doing, and they have their own internal politics and rivalries, but they have very little to do with the world beyond this. The names of Aditi and Akademi are just about recognised, but evidently don't mean much...even Pushkala is not so important in this world.

Gorringer 2000b [fieldnotes for SADiB research]

The last reference is to professional dancer, teacher and choreographer Pushkala Gopal, an Indian Tamil, who has worked for over thirty years in London to further the cause of South Asian Dance, and who is herself very well known and regarded in the UK South

Asian dance community (of performers, audiences, scholars and art administrators). She was instrumental in establishing the ISTD examinations in Bharatanatyam and uses these exams in her school of dance; she also taught on the South Asian undergraduate dance course at Middlesex University. The indication here is how estranged both professional and non-professional dance teachers are from each other's work and how secluded some Sri Lankan community teachers are from the mainstream Indian ones and from the professionals, maintaining a local identity in their dance practices rather than a more global one.

Although the *OFAAL* and *Sangit Preparatory* exams have been designed to accommodate pupils outside India and therefore unable to perhaps devote the time usually expected to their dance training (for example, most UK students would have a lesson once a week, rather than the daily immersion with a dance *guru*²¹), it is the ISTD syllabi that have embraced this need most comprehensively. Pedagogic changes include systems of stretches for warming-up and cooling down at the beginning and end of lessons which acknowledge the different needs of the European and UK situation, where the climate is colder (Subramanyam 2002:26). The concept of a need for healthier dancers within the ISTD syllabi recognises western systems of kinesiology and their importance in the contemporary dance world, systems which stress awareness of the science of motion in order to reduce injury and increase skill. As Gopal states, 'A section that has been entirely created for dance teaching in the current context is the section on the physical culture of conditioning and preparing the body for each session...' (in Ghosh 1999:18); this would include knowledge of strength, flexibility, muscular endurance, cardio-respiratory endurance and neuro-muscular co-ordination.

Innovation in Kathak too is shown in the concentration on '*Anga Suddhi* – the correct use of the body in dance' (ISTD Kathak outline syllabus 2001:5) at the beginning of learning the form. This focuses on proper posture, stance, co-ordination and the mobility of the feet and wrists. Several teachers commented on the importance of including this area at an early stage saying how it would 'help the dancers maintain a healthy body' (Banerjee 2002:55). Gopal also notes how much emphasis was given to health and safety

awareness when they were training the teachers in the new ISTD syllabus (Gopal 2000:55). Not only are the ISTD teachers offered in-service training in these matters, but the syllabi test the students' knowledge of the reasons for effective warming up and cooling down of the body.

Students too are encouraged to attend dance performances (including contemporary ones) and keep programmes and related material including from libraries and exhibitions, as the syllabus recognises that 'South Asian dance students ... are in an environment that may not necessarily complement the experience of Kathak training' (ISTD Kathak outline syllabus 2001:2). Hence the need to consciously write in to the syllabus specific aspects of the culture as part of the training.

The syllabus is designed to give a cultural experience true to both its Indian heritage and in tune with the Western cultural context in which it is now being practised.
ISTD full Kathak syllabus, 2001:2

Although still in its early days, teachers from Europe, the UK and India have confirmed its potential in achieving such aims (Banerjee 2002:55). Other changes include the introduction of *abhinaya* (language of gesture and facial expression to convey emotional content and story lines) to the teaching at the beginning of Bharatanatyam training, whereas in a traditional context this would only be learned after the student is proficient in the technical components of *adavus* (pure dance steps).

The fact that the ISTD is a British-based institution run by non-Asians may account for a noticeable reluctance by some of the South Asian teachers to use its examination system, and their preference for utilising the already established Indian methods. Perhaps too, its full name is a deterrent to the Asian community – the term 'Imperial' still carrying notions of colonialist supremacy for some. Prickett suggests that a 'fundamental dichotomy exists in the name, the title of the organisation – the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing – and the integration of post-colonial dance forms in its portfolio' (Prickett 2004:16). Yet, conversely, Banerjee writes of an Indian Kathak teacher in Bombay who has found the ISTD syllabus entirely appropriate for her Indian dance students, remarking on its strengths and adding 'Indians love examinations and foreign qualifications. The idea of having another piece of paper from a recognised organisation

in England is always exciting!’ (Mehta, in Banerjee 2002:55). There is a certain irony too in the Tamil teachers deferential attitude to the Kalakshetra-style pedagogy for Bharatanatyam, as ‘the Kalakshetra curriculum was modeled after (British) academically text-based methods’ (Coorlawala 2004:54) and taught in English, and as Coorlawala argues, has become ‘the global model for academic certifications in Bharatanatyam’ (ibid:55).

During fieldwork in both London and Leicester, many teachers have remarked on how much they have had to change their ways of teaching to meet the needs of the British students. They told me of their own training in India, rather strict and formal, even at times forceful (being hit if mistakes were made, for example), and this they feel is not appropriate or acceptable here. But many do lament the lack of discipline they find in the children – the short concentration span, the talking during class, the lack of practice at home – but say if they do try to enforce greater discipline, the children do not return. These difficulties are reinforced by other factors observed, such as the paucity of appropriate space to teach dance classes (noted in earlier chapters), and by some of the teachers’ own lack of training in methods of teaching. Expectations of the children are high, yet strategies are not implemented always to bridge the gap between these expectations and the standard of the students, creating frustrations on both sides. My own western background and approach as an experienced (and trained) teacher of dance to a wide-range of ages made it difficult to maintain objectivity whilst watching some South Asian dance classes. Amongst teachers following non-ISTD syllabi, there was no evidence of warming up or cooling down or initial stretching of limbs. Young children of five and six were asked to stand in the basic position of *aramandi* (like a ballet ‘first position’ and in demi-plié) in their first Bharatanatyam lesson with their feet at right angles to their legs, whilst they struggled to keep their balance and their insteps rolled in. Dance kinesiologist Sally Fitt warns of the problems of pronation of the tarsus, stating ‘The frequent warning to keep the knees directly over the toes in plié is a protection against the tendency to pronate the tarsus in plié position’ (1996:36-37). In ballet classes there are frequent verbal reminders of this tendency and the need to correct it.

In some South Asian dance classes I observed, there were incidents of teachers shouting and reprimanding children, showing their exasperation if one had forgotten a complex step, or one was struggling to learn something missed due to absence. Steps, if demonstrated at all, were shown facing the class and students were expected to reverse what they saw, instead of ‘mirroring’ the movements which is far easier for younger children. In one class, a young girl had difficulty with a particular step, so the whole class performed it over and over again with her while she struggled. Corrections in English are brief, and concentrate on getting the bodyline accurate. ie. ‘Watch your hands’, ‘Make your arms nice’, ‘Elbows up’, ‘Bend more’, ‘Tighten your hands and arms’, ‘Follow your hands’, ‘Go right down to the floor’, and several of the teachers followed the traditional form of sitting down to teach and just demonstrating with the arms and hands. Thus students are encouraged to learn through verbal correction rather than through demonstration or physical adjustment. Gaston comments how marked this is in the teaching of Bharatanatyam, describing how

a convention has grown up whereby the role of the teacher involves providing rhythmic accompaniment and a watchful eye, but does not usually include demonstrating the dance. This is despite the fact that many teachers today are, or were dancers. Those teaching methods used in the 1930s and 1940s were similar to those in evidence today.

Gaston 1996:113

Chitra Sundaram, a London-based Bharatanatyam dancer and choreographer recalls too the past practice of teachers sitting down to teach and offering only oral instructions, contrasting this with the ISTD’s move to involve teachers fully in all aspects of training (2001:47).²²

All classes I observed began and ended with the *namaskar*, (*pranam* or *salam*), the conventional bow to the deity, and in the Tamil Bharatanatyam classes, the girls also touched the block and stick (*tattu-kali*) as a mark of respect to the teacher at the end of each session. The ISTD syllabus also includes the bow for the commencement and close of class as well as the exams. The syllabi too, in Bharatanatyam and Kathak begin in Grade 1 with the learning of three traditional, religious prayers, both in recitation and then danced. In discussion with Bisarka Sarker, a professional dancer and teacher, she raised the question of these prayers being included. Did this mean it is a religious

practice taught in this way? Who are the prayers for? (personal communication 16.10.01). If it is a spiritual or religious statement, then do Gaston's conclusions, that 'the modern trend towards increased spiritual content seems to be a systematic attempt to validate the antiquity of the dance by emphasizing its religious components' (1999:274), hold true in this example of the ISTD system of teaching?

Although the ISTD syllabus acknowledges that it retains many elements of traditional training, including the *namaskar* and use of *margam*²³ for the basis of the syllabus, as Sushmita Ghosh explains, it was created

by analysing the dance forms and the traditional teaching approach
with a point of view of emphasising the universal and the contemporary
in our age-old classical traditions.

Ghosh 1999:18

Its pedagogy is located in both old forms and new models by being innovative and by complementing the traditional training as well as adding new elements. In meeting the changing needs of today's more cosmopolitan students, further invention within the frame of tradition has been noted where teachers will choreograph particular items to suit a student's religious background, particularly for an *arangetram*. A Jesus *stuti*, (praise or eulogy) created for a Catholic Tamil; several Christian items choreographed for a non-Asian dancer's *arangetram*; and items made to *bhajans* especially for Sai Baba followers are examples quoted by dance teachers when interviewed regarding the question of innovation. New dance items also will be choreographed for performances to include groups, or to convey political or social themes, yet this mostly remains within the classical framework. The move to incorporate what is called by some teachers in Leicester 'semi-classical', 'creative', or 'contemporary' would to many traditionalists' eyes appear to be a leaning towards the film dance, yet the Leicester teachers do make a distinction between the two. There is no doubt that this 'creative' genre contains a mix of styles, and is frequently performed to more popular music, and at times, to film songs.

7.5 Towards the future

In examining perceptions of religiosity and cultural identity in Hindu dance practices, certain issues have emerged from the fieldwork. The influence of the genre of Bollywood dance features in the Leicester dance milieu, impacting on both the

transmission and the performances. There appears to be a diminishing interest in the learning of classical dance forms and a burgeoning impetus in performance of the filmi dance routines. Leicester South Asian dance teachers have spoken of the pressure to incorporate this into their teaching, whilst many of the young people learn their ‘technique’ from the Hindi videos they watch. Bharatanatyam teachers interviewed in London have little interest in this form, and are in fact quite disparaging about it. So too are dance commentators in India, calling it ‘a blend of tradition and vulgarity’ (Rajendran 1997:38). Rajendran continues by stating that people are at:

a total loss to comprehend what this manner of permissive hip-swaying had in common with the subcontinent’s vibrant dance tradition. Verily has the dance form undergone a sea change, both in concept and execution, from the serene Fifties.

Rajendran 1997:39

Within the teaching of the classical styles of Kathak and Bharatanatyam in the UK, several types of syllabi are available, ranging from the Indian-based *Prayag Sangit Samiti*, the Tamil *OFAAL* and *Academy of Fine Arts* through to the relatively new ISTD South Asian Dance Faculty. Examination systems carry the potential to reinforce cultural identity and adhere to older methods of transmission predicated on Indian experience, or may encompass the diverging needs of students here in the UK. Even within a traditional system of teaching classical, there is the possibility of innovation, exemplified perhaps by the ISTD syllabus. The Indian aesthetic notion sees tradition and change as part of one trajectory, held in the concept of *parampara* (tradition), as Vatsyayan describes:

the word itself suggests a passing through, a continual flow from generation to generation, and its essence lies in its continuity. Change is inherent in the continuity, but at no point does a tradition stop its flow.

Vatsyayan 1983:4

The question of what is selected for transmission by the teachers and the communities, and what is being imposed by more socio-cultural and global factors remains an issue for current debate, conveying a perception of events that are at a significant point of change.

Notes:

¹ A term 'contracting Bombay and Hollywood, [which] seems to have been coined by a journalist in India' (Grau 2002:72) and which entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2001. It was first thought demeaning, then affectionate, and is 'now a celebratory term.' (Geetha 2003:31)

² This exhibition *Cinema India: The Art of Bollywood*, transferred to the New Walk Museum, Leicester in the summer of 2005, running there for nearly five months. Many related activities were scheduled including Bollywood dance workshops, performances of Bollywood dance, film showings and Bollywood 'make-overs', which offered hair braiding, nail painting and hand decoration with *mendhi* (henna).

³ Meera Syal, actor, and script writer for *Bollywood Dreams*, interviewed on BBC radio in May 2003, spoke of how the script had to be partly rewritten to accommodate the American audience who are less familiar with Asian culture. It had to be simplified and words like 'chapati' (known to UK audiences) changed. See also Preeti Vasudevan's review of the New York production (2004:28-29).

⁴ One of London's centres for South Asian dance, *Akademi*, has noted that one in five inquiries to their Information and Resources desk ask where Bollywood dance lessons can be found (Chatterjee, 2004:15). The release of the mainstream film *Bride and Prejudice* (Jane Austin à la Bollywood), directed by Gurinda Chadha, in October 2004 elicited new advertising for Bollywood dance classes being held at a well-known London tourist attraction, 'Madame Tussauds'. "Join our Bollywood dancers and learn moves from the hit film *Bride and Prejudice*" offered the advert.

⁵ In *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995:148-149), Rushdie calls this genre of films 'Epico-Mythico-Tragico-Comico-Super-Sexy-High-Marsala-Art'.

⁶ See also Susan Leigh Foster's comments on the video dancing body and how it is 'often constructed from the edited tapes of dance movement filmed from different angles and distances' (1997:255). The motion of this body is controlled in the filming and editing process by slowing, speeding it up, and by replicating and cutting techniques. Sherril Dodds' book, *Dance on Screen* (2001) examines in detail the phenomenon of screen dance, offering a contextual overview and an analysis of a selection of case studies of this genre. She too discusses in full the creation and manipulation of a screen dancing body.

⁷ A slang Hindi term for the movement of the hips and pelvis in film dance that implies using the dance movements as a form of seduction.

⁸ Coorlawala (2004:56) writes too of a phase in India during the 1950s-1980s when classical Bharatanatyam dancers made use of padded costumes to enhance their breasts and hips to conform to the expected view of dancers being curvaceous and physically fulsome. This was considered more feminine and attractive.

⁹ Steve Derné's ethnographic work in India on the filmgoing habits of young Indian men confirms that their experience of watching the heroines' dances are of a scopophilic nature (2000:148)

¹⁰ The actors mime the words to the recorded tracks of professional singers, which is 'played back' on the set. These singers are as famous as their actor counterparts.

¹¹ The dance numbers in the TV film *Krishna* (1989) cost almost 10 million rupees per item, and for one song, *Jhanjaria*, 250 dancers, 100 camels and about 1,000 acres of desert area were used for the filming.

¹² Saroj Khan has received the prestigious Best Choreography Award from the *Fanfare Awards* in India (thought of as the 'Oscars of India') twice –in 1988 [*Tezaab*] and in 2002 [*Devdas*], indicating 'the growing influence of choreographers in popular Hindi cinema' (Shrestova 2004:93) and the extent of public recognition for their choreography.

¹³ Twelve years on from this 1993 research, this aspect still remains valid in terms of the accessibility of films on DVD rather than video.

¹⁴ The comments on use of video now include, of course, DVDs.

¹⁵ *Mela* (Sk.) – a gathering or fair, often used also as a term for religious and secular festivals.

¹⁶ To those trained in classical dance systems (both eastern and western), the notion of being self-taught can carry perceptions of a route that is easier and less disciplined, and one that generally creates a low level of performance. Ruth Finnegan's study of music-making in a small English town, however, noted that the classical system of music pedagogy (exams, grades, one-to-one tuition) existed alongside a 'self-taught' process which involved 'immense commitment and discrimination' (1989:137) with its own rigour and musical skill.

¹⁷ In her defence, Rukmini Devi countered this accusation by stating that she thought the *bhakti rasa* (devotion) very important, but that 'sringara is important too. Perhaps my interpretation of sringara was different from the way in which most people conceived of it. Sringara is not sensuality. It also means love of a great kind, such as the love of Radha for Krishna as depicted in *Gita Govindam...*' (Ramnarayan 1984:23)

¹⁸ See also Thomas 2003, Chapter 4.

¹⁹ Another syllabus, not researched here in detail, is offered by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The Bhavan Centre (as it is now known) set up its own exams for Bharatanatyam and Kathak in 1985, based on experience in India and Britain, and each year the syllabi are revised. The students take a 3-year Diploma course, with annual exams and are assessed by one internal examiner, and one external examiner from India (see Gorringer 2003). In the summer of 2004, 150 dance students were enrolled at the Bhavan to learn either Bharatanatyam or Kathak.

²⁰ There have been three or four further systems of Tamil examinations created but these focus on music and do not include dance.

²¹ 'For centuries the transmission of classical dance forms in India was achieved through the *guru-shishya parampara*, a lineage of transmission through a one-on-one teacher-disciple relationship. The *gurukula* system of the past involved the disciple spending extensive time with the *guru*, establishing a level of devotion to the teacher uncommon in western dance training' (Prickett 2003a:1).

²² Sujata Banerjee, a UK-based Kathak dancer and teacher, has trained in sports science, and is working to apply aspects of anatomy, nutrition, optimum performance targets and psychological and health matters to her teaching of Kathak.

²³ *Margam* (path) refers to the traditional concert order of a Bharatanatyam performance which includes certain items in a prescribed order.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusion

8.1 Performances of faith

This research, questioning how a community utilises dance in its expression of religious faith, reveals that both Gujarati and Tamil communities invest significant time, energy, and commitment and reveal considerable socio-cultural self-consciousness in their cultural and religious practices. These practices include not only dance but also music, ritual and language and remain for the most part, hidden from the non-Asian public eye and receive little or no money from the public purse. They play a fundamental role in the cultural and social lives of UK Asian Hindus of all ages and are not covert events. They do not, however, feature as part of mainstream arts interest, and most non-Asians are unaware of their existence. It is in this sense that they are 'hidden', remaining veiled to 'outsiders'. A secondary sense applies here too, as these practices also remain hidden in academic research, shown by a dearth of writing and by scant interest in this area. I refer also to a third understanding of the concept 'hidden', which I take from Ruth Finnegan's study of English music-making (1989:4); it alludes to the lack of awareness of the participants themselves of what other community practitioners are doing (in terms of dance) and of the extent of their own participation (in terms of dance). Thus the world of local dance practices remains 'partially veiled' (ibid) not just to outsiders but also to many of its own contributors. Examples are manifold in my research: young people studying Bharatanatyam dance in one of the Tamil weekend schools were unaware of the names of prominent London professional Bharatanatyam dancers; Leicester Kathak and Bollywood dance teachers did not know of the London Tamil dance scene, and perhaps understandably, those performing and teaching were not aware of the importance and scope of their work in the wider field of dance activity in the UK.

The dance practices of the Gujaratis and the Tamils framed by a religious setting become, I have argued, 'performances of faith' for those communities, displayed through the gestures and postures of their devotional action in homes, temples and at religious

festivals. Examining first the UK Sri Lankan Tamil groups, there is widespread practice of dance activities that include Bharatanatyam performances and training, and trance dancing as an integral part of their religious and devotional practices. These 'cultural performances'¹ (Singer 1972:71) that I have termed 'performances of faith' are a mode of exhibiting an adherence and commitment to Hinduism - to the performers, to fellow devotees and community participants and to any 'outside' audience (researchers, visitors and others). For a community in a 'foreign' environment, where the first-generation members grew up surrounded by the signifiers of religion in their homeland, cultural practices such as those described help to construct, exhibit and reinforce those religious and cultural symbols. These performances confirm and display not only a general Hindu identity, but also a specific Tamil religious identity, located as they are, within Tamil temple ritual and at Tamil-specific festivals, such as *Tai Pusam*. Interestingly, despite this display and 'performance of faith', the sense of being veiled to non-invited outsiders still persists.

Research in Malaysia on Tamil Hindus carried out by Willford (2002) at *Tai Pusam* and in Diesel's (2003) examination of the Tamil community's religious and cultural activities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa corroborates that dance practices and trance dance are a prominent part of the religious expression of these diasporic communities, as I have argued for the UK Tamil communities. For the working class Tamil devotees in these examples, it is a crucial aspect of identifying their own particular Indian ethnicity; in South Africa, Tamil cultural and religious practices distinguish the south Indians from the north Indian groups, and in Malaysia, Tamil festival rituals including trance dance asserts Tamilness in the face of Malay-Islamic modernism. This is not always the case, however. O'Shea's work with Canadian émigré Tamil dance groups, for example, has found that Bharatanatyam, rather than being a vehicle for religious sentiment and ethnicity, has become a medium for political and nationalist views (2001:131-134).

In addition to performances of Bharatanatyam dance and trance dance at festival times, there is a growing phenomenon of provision of Bharatanatyam dance classes for the young Tamil women, both in the UK and in the world-wide Tamil diaspora (Cunningham

1998; Ram 2000; Katrak 2004; Chakravorty 2004). These classes contribute to a transmission of traditional culture and maintenance of diasporic identity in locations where unconscious assimilation of social, cultural and religious values does not take place as informally as it does in India. There it is part of the invisible sub-culture and reinforced unconsciously throughout a child's upbringing. Kalpana Ram argues that the conscious move to transmit and represent heritage through cultural practices indicates that there is already a sense of loss, a breakdown of the continuity of that heritage (2000:262). In fact, Katrak (2004:84) writes of second-generation South Asians in their relocated diaspora spaces as 'insider-outsiders' –insiders as South Asians but outsiders to their family traditions. In my interviews, first-generation immigrants in the UK frequently alluded to their concerns at the compromises they have had to make in their children's cultural upbringing because of both internal and external pressures (see endnote 8), and many now actively run or have set up classes for the young people to imbibe their language and culture. Second-generation Asians in many cases now continue their work.² This indicates a level of awareness of loss and a sense of anxiety about the stability of tradition and that 'what is most representative and prestigious about Indian civilisation' (Ram 2000:264) may be lost.³

The presence of these dance classes situated within several major London Tamil temples signifies a new contemporary link of the dance with religious ritual and religious expression in the diasporic setting, and the increased importance assigned to its dissemination within religious practice. Dance can be seen as a factor in the 'doing' of religion or of faith, in the sense that 'doing is believing' (Myerhoff 1977:223). During the last several decades amongst the disciplines of religious studies, anthropology, history and psychology there has been an increased attention to the performance or doing of religion (Bell 1998:205) in both a kinesthetic and synesthetic sense. In dance ethnology, Sklar has theorised an approach to understanding the spiritual knowledge of a community by investigating the gestures, postures and movements of devotional or religious action (2001a), an approach I have made use of in this particular study. Not only the specific dance forms of Bharatanatyam and its performative genre at festival times, and the folk

traditions of *Garba* and *Raas* at *Navratri*, but the movements and actions of the devotees and priests during temple worship have offered a rich display of embodied knowledge. This knowledge is the key to their experience of faith, their beliefs in the presence of the deities and establishes the orthopraxy of Hinduism for each individual. Perhaps this is akin to Finnegan's 'local system' of knowledge that she discovered amongst her musicians through their practices, suggesting that by 'looking closely at people's *actions* really was a route to discovering a local system that, even to me, was quite unexpected in its complexity and richness' (1989:8). It does too, confirm, as in theories of embodiment (Csordas 2002, Bourdieu 1990) that through the perspective of embodiment the body and mind respond to the world as one unified principle, that is the body (and mind) are the locus for receiving and giving out of information or knowledge through movement and the senses (see Smith 2002). In this process which is more than just a lived movement or action, the embodied self engages and communicates experience in a non-verbal way to self and others.

In a performative approach, both the performing and the participant witnessing of such events are essential, as both self and other are active participants for the performance to be enacted. Schechner's definition of performance as activity that calls for the presence of others, of witnesses (1988:30) is apposite here. It is in these ritual performances that meaning is communicated and certain transformations and experiences take place. It is both a kinesthetic and synesthetic experience for all participants and devotees, and at these occasions, binary distinctions between observing audience and performing devotee are collapsed into one whole. The importance of 'performing faith' for all those present in this sense has been highlighted during the fieldwork in both communities, and analysed, from the participation in and observation of the Gujarati *Navratri* folk dances, and the Bharatanatyam dance performances within the temple context, to the ecstatic trance dance seen in both groups' religious occasions. Turner's description below highlights the depth and importance of such occasions that allow a piercing of the membrane of the mundane to experience a perception that some would term spiritual, some religious and others, an impression of a greater sense of their own awareness, or a

heightened consciousness of their own being. It is what Zarrilli terms ‘an extraordinarily deep sense of “interiority”’ (2003:24).

In a sense, every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, and poetry, is explanation and explication of life itself...Through the performance process itself, what is normally sealed up, inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning, in the depth of sociocultural life, is drawn forth.

Turner 1982a:13

I conclude that the performativity of events in the embodied movements of ritual and festival celebrations of Hindu devotees are ‘performances of faith’, and that they reveal, as Bell describes, that the body has ‘a critical place in the social construction of reality’ (1992:95). The ‘doing’ of the actions *is* believing, underlining again how Hinduism is an orthopraxic faith. A Hindu devotee performing his or her faith embodies that devotion at that time – it is what he or she *is* - it is what is known by both the performer and any audience. The specific knowledge is an embodied knowledge, or as Sklar has described, ‘The body does not hold experience; rather, it *is* experience, a process rather than an object’ (2001a:193). Roy Rappaport stresses this point, indicating how an act itself (e.g. someone kneeling) is not simply a communication of that act, but produces ‘a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself’; that is, ‘a body identified with subordination’ (Bell 1992:99-100). It is these embodied actions in the realm of dance and devotional worship that have revealed the breadth and depth of a faith that is more performed than known, and have shown how ‘the body is an intimate arena for the practices of [cultural] reproduction’ (Appadurai 1996:67). My respondents confirmed this point relating to their knowledge and practice of Hinduism. They were surprisingly confident in performing the actions pertaining to religious rituals, but strikingly unconfident when asked to speak about their knowledge or meaning of those actions. For these devotees, their actions *were* their knowledge of Hinduism –the ritual practices and actions were an embodiment of that knowledge and their faith.

If the same question is asked of the Gujarati Hindu community – how dance is utilised in its expression of religious faith – the Hindu religious festival of *Navratri* reveals that the folk movement forms of *Garba* and *Raas* form a central and essential element in the social, cultural and religious performance of the Gujarati *Navratri* celebrations. For the Gujaratis, *Navratri* is synonymous with the playing of these dance forms, and as Khan

emphasises, 'In East Africa, where so many British Gujaratis come from, garbas and dandias were central to their religious identity' (2004:n.p.). The Leicester Gujarati population, mainly immigrants from East Africa, is well-known for their religious affiliations (Jackson 1981, Williams 1984, Dwyer 1994), and their well-established patterns of worship that had been consciously and confidently practised in East Africa were then imported to the UK. In Leicester, not only were religious groups established in private houses before any temples were built (or converted), but the *Garba* and *Raas* was organised at *Navratri* festivals in the mid-1960s, even before the large exodus from East Africa. My respondents talked of the significance of the religious aspects of *Navratri* and endorsed the fact that the dances were seen as part of their Gujarati religious heritage. The *Navratri* festival is the locus for the transmission of Gujarati religious and socio-cultural practices and a powerful confirmation of caste identity. In a similar way as demonstrated by the Tamils, playing the folk forms at *Navratri* constructs not only a Hindu identity, but a specific Gujarati Hindu identity.

The symbiotic relationship of the *Navratri* movement forms and Gujarati religious faith is exemplified during each evening's event of the ten-day festival. The playing of *Garba* begins the evening and creates the concentrated, devotional state of mind and body before the evening's religious ceremony. The prayers and *arati* of the religious ceremony form the central item of the event, and are followed by the *Raas*, the stick dance. In this way the specific Gujarati dances construct a frame that focuses on the central sacred religious ritual. These vibrant, energetic and participatory folk dances displayed at *Navratri* are an expression of the Gujaratis' faith in their deities encapsulated by the Hindu Vaishnavite tradition – a tradition that has for hundreds of years accentuated religious faith through performance of dance, music and drama in its mode of *bhakti*. There are many examples: the Bengali Vaishnavite cult (Kinsley 1979); the *Sattriya* tradition in the Assamese monasteries where the young men are trained in music, dance and drama and perform stories from the *Ras Lila* at festival times (David 2002:20); the *Ras Lila* performances in Vrindavan, Krishna's mythical birthplace – all articulations of a particular devotional worship that privileges 'performing' for the deity in a religious locale.

8.2 Diasporic identities

How identity is constructed in a post-colonial, re-located diasporic milieu and what part dance practices play in transmitting, representing or reworking these socio-cultural and religious categories of identity have formed the central findings of this research. Further studies in South Asian dance and music in a diasporic setting have stressed too how ‘the importance of expressive cultural forms and practices are central to any articulation of ethnic identity’ (Hyder 2004:12; see also Nodwell 1996, Ram 2000, Katrak 2004, Mackerras 2005), confirming my conclusions of the essential nature of dance praxis to both the Tamil and Gujarati UK groups. Recent theories of identity have addressed the complexity and hybridity of the cultural identities being forged by young Asians in Britain – identities that have been termed ‘new ethnicities’ (Hall 1988) to indicate the particular background, particular culture and particular experience that no longer binds these second and third generation Asians. As Eade points out, new ethnic identities ‘point to a liminal third space – the boundary between the opposites of insider/outsider’ (1997a:147) where new narratives of belonging are negotiated. Research into British *Bhangra* music and the transnational new Asian dance music (Sharma et al 1996, Dudrah 2002a) have examined the contested locations of South Asian identity in urban Britain and noted how these layered identities are articulated through the medium of music in a trajectory similar to that of dance.

Interviews with my respondents have revealed that boundary maintenance by Asian ethnic groups as theorised by Barth (1969) and more recently by Rogers Brubaker (2005) remains a tool of the diasporic situation. Gujarati caste (*jati*) groups are maintained at many *Navratri* practices, and the predominance of spoken Tamil in the Tamil temples and weekend schools asserts a distinctiveness that distances non-Tamil speakers. Brubaker notes that there has been an explosion of interest in diasporas since the 1980s, leading to an attenuation of the original meaning of the term. He argues, however, that three core elements still remain – that of dispersion, of homeland orientation and of boundary-maintenance (2005:5-6). Brubaker states that boundary maintenance among migrants is to be expected, and that it only becomes relevant to sociological studies when it persists into the second, third and subsequent generations. Alongside this is a shift

towards a fluid, hybridisation of identity as boundaries are eroded, evident amongst second and third generations. In both Hindu groups, the stake-holders in tradition, that is the first generation and some of the older second generation place a high value on their dance and music praxis as a vehicle for Hindu identity through their own traditions. Playing *Garba* and *Raas* at *Navratri* signifies for the Gujaratis both their Hindu identity and their particular Gujarati ethnicity, put succinctly by seventeen-year old Neha, 'The dance style is part of who I am – my roots, culture and belief' and by fifteen-year old Anjaree who endorsed that 'through dance we pray'. These comments can be contrasted with young Asians for whom Asian and western club music is an essential part of their distinctiveness and individuality. Clubbing, attending music festivals, driving with loud music in cars are modes of expressing a modern, 'Asian Kool', global identity which may either sit happily with traditional practices or eschew it altogether.⁴ Rehan Hyder comments that music, like dance, is 'a site of cultural negotiation and change, where identities are performed and transformed' (2004:5), suggesting this is evidence of a more hybrid, fluid notion of cultural and ethnic identity.

For the Sri Lankan Tamils, particularly the older generation, the classical dance form of Bharatanatyam (in its post-colonial, revival mode) has become essentially a Tamil cultural and religious identity marker. Young Tamil dance students from mixed socio-economic backgrounds⁵ substantiated this view when they stated, in interviews and in questionnaires that 'Bharatanatyam helps me learn more about religion' (Sahaana, aged thirteen), 'Bharatanatyam is part of my culture' (Geetha, same age), and that 'It teaches you and the audience about the gods of Hindu religion and prevents the culture and religion being forgotten, especially in the west' (Sophie, aged sixteen). Yet perhaps these girls are not representative of second and third generation Asians, despite the traditional views they have imbibed. They are, I suggest, more representative of a community whose settlement patterns is at an earlier stage than the Gujaratis, where boundary maintenance is less eroded.

The ascriptions of religious and cultural identity maintained through the medium of dance are common to many, although not all diasporic groups world-wide (Cunningham 1998,

David 1999, O'Shea 2003), revealing notions of culture that sustain a sense of shared customs, values and beliefs that are handed down from generation to generation, and that speak of culture as a fixed and bounded object, despite current theorisation of culture as non-static, dynamic and an evolving 'dimension of phenomena' (Appadurai 1996:13). 'It is part of my culture' say the girls interviewed; others speak of the importance of their children in the UK learning Hindu culture. These articulations of culture tend to maintain boundaries and a sense of difference, by stressing culture as a property of individuals or groups. They speak too of an embodied *habitus*, an embodied sense of the past in the gestures and movements that belong, in the case of Bharatanatyam, to Tamil womanhood. Bourdieu's term, *habitus*, refers to the attitudes, dispositions and tastes that form the mental and physical disposition of a person and sub-consciously govern their behaviours and actions. The folding of a *sari*, the applying of *kumkum* on the forehead, the fluent and practised gestures that plait the hair – this everyday body language is signified in the particular *habitus* of an adult Indian woman and creates a socially informed body.

Yet for many young people, their 'cultural' identity is a syncretic, fluid, amalgam of past and future, Asian and British, black and brown – an identity that is multi-layered and multi-faceted. This more versatile, complex and developing sense of identity of the younger generations expresses notions of culture and religion that are more personal and less circumscribed by the beliefs of the preceding generations. It is indicative of an eroding of ethnic boundaries and of a greater influence of globalisation in areas such as music, fashion, religion and politics. Many of the Leicester Gujarati dance students acknowledged dance to be part of their Hindu faith, but one third of those interviewed disagreed and saw no correlation between their dance practice and concepts of faith or religion. 'I dance as a hobby' said twelve-year old Ashka, and Meena, aged fifteen simply stated, 'It is nothing to do with religion'. Two fifteen-year olds responded too that dance meant expressing something that was personal to them, 'from inside my heart' and 'what I myself believe in', although they would not term it 'religious', confirming Modood's comments that second-generation Asians are negotiating their own 'religion of private spirituality' (1994:50).

The same second-generation Hindus in Modood's study acknowledged religion to be important, but felt it was a matter of personal spiritual fulfilment that each should find in his own way, perhaps more in line with the dominant beliefs of the UK population. Regular, formal worship and attendance at the temple were no longer seen as a necessary structure in their lives, unlike the first generation groups. Eade's study of young Bangladeshi Muslims in London's East End shows that they inhabit a 'more complex, fragmented, deeply reflexive world where individuals can develop highly versatile interpretations of collective solidarities' (1997a:161). I would suggest that we are seeing not a single phenomenon of religious beliefs held by second and now third generation Asians, but a highly variable articulation of selfhood that ranges widely from conservative and devout religious affiliation to a comprehensive rejection of ethnic religious practice. Along this continuum is a range of more individual viewpoints which include such concepts as 'private spirituality', 'personal spiritual fulfilment' and 'unstructured religion.'

8.3 Confluences of the global and the local

The tension and intersection of global and local influences play a further part in the complex construction of identity within diaspora groups. Cvetkovich and Kellner (1997:12) remind us that 'tradition, religion and nationalism' remain contemporary forces in the construction of both personal and national life. This play of global and local forces of tradition, religion and nationalism has a significant impact on dance practices and ethnic identity in the Hindu communities. The adaptive strategies used to facilitate the interwoven trajectories of cultural preservation and modification seen in UK Hindu communities are fuelled by pressures internally within the communities and externally from outside forces, that is, forces that are both local and global. This can be seen for instance in the strength of the global ties and geographical movement between members of the UK Gujarati groups and their family members in villages in Gujarat, India, that create a 'two-way flow of people, capital and ideas' (Rutten and Patel 2004:244), including a new phenomenon of 'world citizens' (ibid:253). This refers to the many Gujarati elders who travel regularly from their Gujarati village homes to take up several months residence with their offspring in the UK, the USA or even East Africa (ibid:

2004). Gerry Farrell's study of South Asian music in Britain argues that 'British South Asian musicians and producers now play a central role in creating music that is later consumed both in India and Britain' (Farrell et al 2005:109), emphasising the complexity of the relationship between local and global in relation to UK South Asian music manifestations. In recent years, the accessibility and lower costs of inter-continental travel have enabled the dancers I interviewed in Leicester and London to travel more frequently to India to obtain new dance costumes, record fresh music tapes or have extra lessons with their original dance *gurus*. Thus the global flow of travel informs, supports and makes possible the local manifestations, in this instance, of South Asian dance performance and dance transmission in Leicester. As discussed in Chapter Four, many important Gujarati performances at Hindu festival occasions in Leicester and London are regularly sponsored and filmed by Sony TV Asia and Zee TV-Europe⁶ and broadcast back to audiences in Gujarat, again indicating how global and local forces can not only coexist but can intersect to produce new syntheses of cultural productions and identities.

These examples in Leicester indicate that diaspora issues (including cultural expressions such as dance and music) are at a significant juncture, influenced by global factors (particularly film and Asian TV channels) as well as local issues (caste groups retaining their own *Navratri* practices to the exclusion of other castes, for example), and this change in attitude is beginning to dictate how and which cultural forms are transmitted and to whom and by whom. As Appadurai states, it is 'the tension between global and local that drives cultural reproduction today' (1996:63) as the communities' diasporic position necessitates the intentional reproduction of cultural symbols that are no longer implicit.

In the local Tamil community in London, the scene is a somewhat different one. The classical dance style of Bharatanatyam is generally recognised as a transnational and global form, yet in the Tamil temples and Tamil weekend schools, the teaching remains dominated by local modalities. The students are neither encouraged to attend international performances of South Asian dance nor are made aware of the work of well-known performers in London and the UK. Most syllabi used are written in Tamil and the

dance classes taught in Tamil, even though the second-generation students are more familiar and more at ease with English. The catchment area of these students too is the local geographical environment, and despite the influences of London as a major global city (Eade 1997b:11), it is these local factors that influence the Tamil community. The more inward-looking and somewhat wary nature of the Sri Lankan Tamils and their more recent immigration and settlement patterns are factors at work here. The global influences of the Bollywood dance styles sit uneasily with the first-generation's adherence to their traditional cultural and religious beliefs and there remains a tension between the struggle to maintain local (and Tamil) cultural traditions against these perceived eroding forces of globalisation. This 'production of locality' (Appadurai 1996:180), seen in these terms, demands constant and hard work to be sustained under the pressures of diasporic living. Appadurai notes how in terms of local cultural reproduction, 'space and time are themselves socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation and action' (ibid), thus creating names, properties, values and meanings for the local community through their specific cultural symbols.

Despite the sense of locality that dominates the Tamil environment, there is evidence too that Tamil dance events are involved in the production of both local and global elements in relation to Sri Lanka. In March 2005, the Sri Lankan Tamil community in south London hosted a programme of music and dance to raise funds for a new charity, *Tamil Aid*. This organisation was set up in January 2005 to help with the rehabilitation of victims of the Tsunami disaster (December 2004) in the north and east of Sri Lanka. The performers and audience were local Tamil children who study music and dance at the Surbiton Tamil temple and who were supported by their families and guests from the Sri Lankan community as audience, yet the event was filmed by CeeITV, a global digital Tamil channel where it was broadcast to Tamils in the UK and elsewhere. The Sri Lankans' political awareness and cultural ties to their homeland are major factors in their diasporic situation, not in the sense of the original meaning of diaspora as a longing to return, but in the sense of a displaced people whose political and financial support is

devoted to rebuilding and supporting their homeland. Tamil globalisation is for the Sri Lankans an adherence to an articulation of Tamil nationalism.

8.4 Negotiating change

How have the Gujaratis and the Tamils, as immigrant communities, responded to their experience of dislocation and rupture, and how they have adapted and reacted to the host⁷ nation and to the dominant culture of the UK? As noted above, both communities place a high value on the nurture and sustaining of their religious festivals in the diaspora space and the dance practices attendant upon these ritual festivities. There is evidence of not only a greater religious emphasis but also a burgeoning of religious practice in general and in the related dance forms in the diaspora setting (Gaston 1996, Katrak 2004). Each of the organisers I interviewed in the London Tamil temples spoke with pride at the increase in the numbers of devotees attending the festivals and alluded to factors such as the presence of the chariot festival in the local streets, now held by all the temples investigated. This was not the case ten years ago. In fact, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple only began to hold a chariot festival after the Queen had made a visit there in her Jubilee year, 2002. Prior to that, the trustees had been concerned not to offend the local middle-class (non-Hindu) area with a noisy street procession (Waghorne 2004). The new growth of confidence is evidenced too in the purchasing of sites for the building of new temples (the London Sri Murugan Temple was opened in May 2005, and the new Mahalakshmi Temple in East Ham is scheduled for opening in 2006).

The conscious transmission of the expressive forms of dance and music and religion as signifiers of tradition, history, nationalism and ethnic identity creates a new definition of Hindu femininity in the diaspora – one that is considered to be all the more important in the face of western influences. Bharatanatyam promises for the Tamils a middle-class respectability and femininity whilst attendance at *Navratri* (primarily a feminine religious festival) signifies to the Gujaratis the women's traditional role of cultural and religious-bearers (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993). Although this female responsibility for the domestic religious worship, for life-cycle rites and for religious nurture as well as the maintenance of female purity is a dominant historical aspect of Hinduism, it has been highly

emphasised by diaspora groups for fear of erosion of cultural and religious practices where implicit Hindu values are not the norm.

Significant also to effective adaptation is the growth in language and religious instruction classes for the young people in both communities, revealing a concern for the transmission of these subjects by first-generation Asians because of their growing sense of loss of traditional values amongst the young people.⁸ The teenagers I interviewed could speak Gujarati, and some could speak Tamil, but they had no competence in the written form of these languages; many are now attending language classes to remedy this situation. Younger children are sent by their parents and some older ones attend of their own accord, but the picture remains a complex one. The teenage girls in the Bharatanatyam class at the London Sri Murugan Temple were uncomfortable speaking Tamil, and spoke to each other in English and responded to their teacher in English even though she addressed them in Tamil. This teacher later explained to me that all her dance vocabulary is in Tamil and she is not therefore so confident of teaching in English (author's fieldnotes 28.9.03). Not all ethnic groups place such a high value on language maintenance as essential to ethnic identity (see David 1998 for research into the Malaysian Sindhi community) and the link between language and ethnicity remains a controversial issue amongst academics.

Leicester dance teachers were troubled by the lack of commitment of their pupils and the little interest shown in the classical dance forms. Several teachers were disappointed at the lack of respect now afforded to dance teachers; some had begun reluctantly to alter their teaching to incorporate other forms such as Bollywood dance and creative dance. Although it appears that there is a changing preference for the Bollywood hybrid film style of dance amongst the young, and a regret by the dance teachers that this is so, I question now whether in fact the commitment to the classical styles has ever been significantly established. There is no strong tradition amongst the older generations of the study of classical dance and music forms, and this is partly due to the caste and class of the particular Gujarati groups who settled in Leicester, and their original background in rural Gujarat and the Punjab. It is also due to the predominance of north Indians in the

UK and their preferences for a style of music, such as music from Bollywood dance films that has emerged out of the Hindustani north Indian style.⁹ Formal tuition in the classical forms of dance only became available in Leicester at the beginning of the 1980s. One classical dancer described the scene in Leicester at that time:

In the beginning...people didn't know anything. They thought that Kathak is a film dance...they couldn't even differentiate what is folk and what is classical. They know what is Raas and Garba but they wouldn't know it was a folk dance. I feel that one thing is that people here who are from Africa, I think they have lost touch with India and they are not aware of this rich cultural heritage of India and they cannot see how dance is part and parcel of the culture.

Interviewee, Hyde at al 1996:24

The significance of how dance forms do or do not travel is shown too in Elsie Dunin's research on the dance forms of the third and fourth generation Chileans in the USA with Croatian ethnic ties. She discovered particular dances that were no longer danced in Croatia yet had maintained a continuity of performance half way round the world. The young people dancing had no direct contact with family members in Croatia, nor did they write or speak Croatian and had only distant contact with the 'homeland' through oral lore. But, on their first visit to Croatia, 'the dancing activity and ...costume provides the principle [sic] means to an expression of their ethnic identity, and now in Croatia, they were experiencing the direct physical contact with that identity' (Dunin 2002:n.p.). Like the *Raas/Garba* forms of the Ugandan Asians, the dances were exported despite the absence of specific cultural models and the lack of cultural ties with the homeland.

In relation to burgeoning interest in Bollywood dance, on one level the perception may be assumed that the preference for Bollywood dance has subsumed any appeal for the classical forms, but I suggest that its freer, more modern, and more overtly body-conscious mode has appropriated the interest from the already well-established traditional Gujarati folk forms, despite their popularity at *Navratri*. Bollywood offers numerous attractions for the younger generation: a breaking away from Hindu cultural taboos on the expressivity of the female body, the provision of a 'cool' image with its hip-hop music and fashions, the lack of formal training and discipline needed to learn the form, and the possibility that anyone can learn the dance moves from videos and create their own choreography. It is too a move away from valuing traditional community participation to

a more western individualistic ethos. Fifteen-year old Rekha told me 'My favourite style is filmi because it is one dance style within which you can incorporate many others'. For Beena, aged twelve, who enjoyed Bollywood dance most out of all the styles (including classical) that she learnt, 'it is exciting and you can do any moves you like'. Others spoke of loving the film music, songs and the beat. These young people are attracted to Bollywood dance because it offers to them a global, expressive, fun, glamorous, modern and cosmopolitan image that appears to contrast starkly with their local, traditional, perhaps more mundane existences in a working class environment. One seventeen-year old Bollywood dance performer at the Leicester Mela was determined that her dance ability would give her entry into the Bollywood dance film world – 'a fairytale good luck story that thousands of British Asians dream of' (*The Times* 7.2.04:3) but which few have managed to achieve. Echoes of these stage and film ambitions can be seen in the dominant host culture in highly successful television programmes such as *Strictly Dance Fever*, *Pop Idol*, and *Fame Academy*¹⁰ (and the programme *Bollywood Star* for young British Asians) where young amateur performers are selected out of thousands of applicants to compete in a chance to win fame and fortune in the performing arts world.

Issues of funding are impacting potently on dance practices and this was especially the case in Leicester, particularly for those struggling to become professional performers. The dancers/dance teachers frequently commented on the difficulties experienced through inadequate payment by organisers and promoters, and the problems in applying for and obtaining funding from other sources.¹¹ This has led to their perception that their dance performance and teaching is under-valued by the local community and the wider host community. Young, talented dancers beginning their careers have to contend too with the problematic labelling of their dance forms as 'classical' and 'traditional', as these labels seem to elicit no interest from the larger, governmental funding bodies. Additionally dance that has a religious or spiritual content does not sit easily with the secular values of the host nation and therefore receives little financial support. Coupled with this are the vexed issues of authenticity, where fixed ideas of an unchanging, traditional and often 'purer' form are held as if part of a cultural essentialism. Some of the Tamil dance teachers interviewed presented Rukmini Devi's

famous dance school of Kalakshetra as the epitome of authenticity, using Kalakshetra style as a criteria to judge standards of Bharatanatyam performance - a way of invoking the past to interpret the present. The London Tamil temple performances of dance have never included any 'creative' or innovative work, as a strict control is kept on the presentation of traditional, classical items. Here, the stakeholders who maintain tradition are the first-generation settlers who have become also the agents for preservation. I argue that the adherence to concepts of purity and women's honour are a dominant aspect of the Tamils' profound commitment to and identity with their language and religion. It is one that creates a type of moral superiority, manifest in their cultural as well as social practices (Thornton and Niththyanathan 1984, McGowan 1993) and one that maintains a certain traditional and conventional view. These themes of purity and chastity within Tamil civilisation have been held in high esteem by the Tamils throughout their history and remain influential throughout the Tamil diaspora, causing Tamils to remain united across the world in their commitment to safeguard their language and culture (Pandian 1998). In dance practices it is shown as an aversion to such forms of movement as Bollywood dance and a retaining of a 'pure' form of Bharatanyam such as that taught at Kalakshetra.

Fair-skinned and blonde, Magdalen Gorringer's authenticity as a Bharatanatyam dancer was questioned by several members of the mixed audience when she performed at an Indian restaurant in Edinburgh, who were disappointed that she was not, in their perception an ethnic, or native dancer (Grau 2002:45-46). Gorringer in fact grew up in India, speaks fluent Tamil and is a competent Bharatanatyam artiste. Examples abound in eastern Europe where ethnomusicologists have battled with experts who wish to retain only 'the most ancient, most national, most adaptable and "purest" elements of local traditional cultures' (Felföldi 1999:55) when documenting 'authentic' folk dance. Buckland (2002:442-3) too describes how pre-modern dance practices 'are positioned as the "authentic Other" in contrast to "the modern"', constructing a binary between old, traditional, pure, authentic, and modern, diluted, impure, adulterated.

As indicated, in the Gujarati community, classical dance forms are not so prominent, so at religious occasions, more creative dance items are performed. The words and music, however, still remain related to the religious occasion, and again, the first-generation community members are those who maintain and organise the events, placing themselves as the stakeholders in tradition and conservation. Given this preference and background in folk styles and a less established place for classical dance, the context is therefore ripe for Bollywood ‘filmi’ dance to flourish.

8.5 Dance and new religious sentiments

Despite the demise of the *devadasi* dancers in the first half of the twentieth century, different strands of the *devadasi* temple dance are being replicated in the contemporary Hindu diaspora in a creative, transplanted and unconscious manner. There is clearly no longer evidence of female ritual specialists, ‘married’ to the deity, yet the Tamil male *kavadi* dance, when analysed, presents elements similar to the *devadasi* function. It is a dance performed as a ritual event in the presence of the deities in the temple. It is, like the dance of the *devadasis*, ‘designed to effect transformation, dedicated to divine forces, embodying creative energies’ (Schwartz 2004:26). Many of today’s Bharatanatyam performances and *arangetrams* unwittingly contain many elements of *devadasi* ritual, even though mainly witnessed on western proscenium stages and despite the tensions and contested history of the dance and its relationship with the temple dancers. The tradition of secular entertainment by the *devadasis* at weddings, social celebrations and as dance storytellers continues in performance today, albeit disguised by the gloss of a middle-class, chaste respectability and framed as performance art not as secular amusement.

The performances of classical or folk dance at religious festivals in the temples or in temporarily-created ritual spaces effectively emphasise the religiosity of the dance and of the dancing body, as I have suggested, and this is substantiated by many of the devotees, priests, dance and music teachers and their students in their responses to questions of their perception of the place of dance in religious worship. In fact for many, dance cannot be divorced from concepts of spirituality or religion. Just as in Sklar’s ‘process and experience of spiritual knowing’ (2001a:187) discovered in the intimate actions and

gestures of the work of the Tortugas fiesta, so the South Asian dance forms contain possibilities of experiential transcendence and enlightenment, called *rasa*. Here is the heart of the union between performer and onlooker (be it a deity or a fellow devotee or audience member) – a true ‘performance of faith’ (see Zarrilli 1987, 1990; Schwartz 2004). Finnegan comments in a similar vein on the nature of music performance and its potential for transcendence for both performer and audience in ritual or religious terms, stating:

The overtones of religious ritual can equally aptly be applied to musical enactment: the quality of being not a ‘mere’ performance but of transmuting action to a new dimension in which the participants both lose themselves and at the same time create and control their own experience and the world around them.

Finnegan 1989:339

Paul Younger’s book on the Chidambaram temple in south India describes a moment of *darshan* in the temple, akin to the experience of *rasa*. He writes that it is ‘a very peaceful, fulfilling experience, which might be described as something like “rapture”, the emotion one might associate with the end of a Mozart opera, or the state to which the soul is led in Plato’s *Symposium*’ (1995:34). Eck (1998:9) describes it too as a kind of knowing, an insight. My ethnographic experience suggests that these types of embodied experiences are not uncommon in Hindu ritual and temple performance located in the contemporary settings of Leicester and London. It can and often is, the way faith is performed and experienced.

Related to this is the place of trance or possession dances within Hindu religious practice, which can be a state of benevolence or divinity or conversely, of demonic power. The benign ecstatic trance dancing of the Tamil devotees at the *Tai Pusam* festival is a potent signifier of Tamil devotion, a performance of faith in the deity Murugan, expressed in the movements and gestures of their dance. It reveals clues about the nature of faith in Tamil Hinduism, that is, in this instance, a belief that the powers of the deity Murugan become embodied in the purified body of the devotee during the dance. These same powers too are believed to bring auspicious results for a vow or plea for help made by the dancing devotee – factors that are specific to that community. It becomes too, as does the dancing form of Bharatanatyam, both a local and national identity marker, appearing in a globalised and localised diasporic location -local in its adherence to Tamil Hinduism and

even more so, to Sri Lankan Tamil Hinduism, and nationalistic in its adherence to Hinduism in general.

During the Gujarati *Navratri* celebrations there is also evidence of some of the women devotees entering a trance whilst dancing. As in the Tamil temples, this too is considered to indicate the auspiciousness and purity of the event, confirmed by my respondents when we watched an older woman go into a trance whilst dancing. Witnessing of the person in a divine trance is thought to confer blessings and the presence of the divine (Hyer 1999), and indeed I observed many devotees of all ages seeking to touch the one possessed to obtain grace and partake of the state of purity. Flood comments on the nature of such Hindu possession, describing it as ‘a socially and culturally defined phenomenon. The possessed ritual dancer acts in a ritually determined way’ (2002:221). Whilst to the outside onlooker, the possession may appear spontaneous and there may be improvisation of movements, the event itself is highly codified and ritualised.

The above examples differ in significance and purpose to the phenomenon of trance dance in other parts of the world. Kapferer’s work amongst Buddhists in Sri Lanka (1991) analyses some of their powerful exorcism rituals where trance dancing is the specialism of the team of male exorcists. Accompanied by drummers, chanters and assistants during the all-night ceremony, the men’s bodies become possessed by the demonic forces inhabiting the ‘patient’ to be exorcised, and an elaborate, competitive and fierce dance proceeds. The ‘patient’ himself may, or may not enter into a semi-trance. Balinese dance too contains many instances of trance or embodied dance, particularly as part of the sacred forms performed in the *jeroan*, the inner temple area. Embodiment is commonly by divine or occasionally demonic spirits and the practice varies according to locality and to the particular type of *Sang Hyang* dances. A common form is danced by prepubescent girls, whose bodies are embodied by divine nymphs once the girls are in a trance. These dances are performed at irregular intervals when needed, to ward off danger or to mitigate disasters (Bandem and deBoer 1995).¹²

Theorists of states of trance and possession (Rouget 1985, Lewis 1989, Bastin 2002) speak of the need to distinguish analytically between trance (a state of altered consciousness) and possession (where the human state is temporarily displaced or inhabited), although as I have found in my own examples and the illustrations above, both can be experienced together forming a single, composite, embodied phenomenon. Embodiment by a spirit or by a form of a deity constitutes a specific performance where the body of the individual literally becomes the body of the possessor – ‘embodiment’ being a more accurate and now more widely used term than ‘possession’. This state of embodiment is indicative of socio-cultural beliefs that identify powerful forces and influences outside the individual, in contrast to an Euro-American culture that identifies them within the individual (Bell 1997). Possession involves present experience but one that is mediated by a historical mythology, and provides a form where personal and the collective are yoked together, as the individual internalises the form of the deity. Public witnessing is of great significance to the event, allowing a corroboration of the extent of the possession. Although embodiment and trance dances contain multi-layered significance which varies from group to group, for Hindus the prime attribute is one of purity and auspiciousness. The possession is a statement, an exhibition of the ‘moral status’ (Kapadia 2000:181) and level of purity of the caste group or community and hence its importance. I refer here too to Srinivas’s term ‘Sanskritization’ (1968) which describes the process by which lower caste Hindu groups seek to raise their hierarchical status by adopting customs of greater purification such as fasting, ritual bathing, donating of gifts, thus becoming of a higher status. It is a system of upward mobility, based on concepts of purity. Hence the significance of an event demonstrating greater purity or auspiciousness.

8.6 Present and future implications

As we have seen, a group’s cultural, ethnic and religious identity may be articulated through dance, acting as a symbol of both continuity and change, and its presence in the diasporic setting can be a powerful marker of the group’s distinctiveness and presence. The expressive South Asian cultural forms rely heavily on dance, drama and music for their enactment, both in a secular and in a religious milieu, and the performing of religion

and entertainment has spawned a multitude of embodied styles and disciplines. The dancing body stems directly from a religious discourse and the concepts of that heritage still remain. Dance and related movement styles form an essential part in the production or performance of faith within Hindu worship – practices that are perhaps accentuated in a diasporic setting where certain cultural patterns that may be at variance with the dominant host community have to be consciously transmitted. Performing faith is a way of actualising one's faith, of making it a reality in an embodied form.

In researching and mapping the dance practices of the Gujarati and Tamil Hindu communities, dance that is commonly invisible to the general public has been brought into focus and made visible, yet as Andrew Ward points out (1997:6), it is a paradoxical situation as in writing, the dancing is divorced from the written product. Yet to use a rational means to examine a non-verbal activity is essential if we are to inquire into the dance and movement systems of human society and to 'argue for the inherent meaningfulness of dance and for the place of dance as an essential human practice' (ibid:7). Hence an ethnographical methodology, despite its complexities (discussed in Chapter Three), remains a direct and effective tool for engagement with people and their embodied praxis, as also for its inscription of both narrative and theory in a 'thick description'. The participatory approach undertaken is invaluable in gaining experience and reflective insights from a movement perspective, for example in the Gujarati *Garba* folk dances, where the repetitive, circular movements created a focussed, inward, quiet attention, not necessarily so obvious from an onlooker's position. My embodied participation has fed into the ethnographic description and led to greater insights in the cultural understanding of human movement (Ness 2004). Embodied participation furthers too the paradigmatic shift in cultural approaches to dance witnessed in the last decade.

This ethnography has brought forth the voices of dancers, teachers, dance students and community members that have been muted in discourses on dance practices and the world of classical dance as well as within sociological, historical, political and performance arenas. It has sought to redress the marginalisation of certain dance forms –

in the community, in religious contexts and in the Hindu diaspora by gathering ethnographic insights at a local level and questioning the embodied identities manifest in the social space of the dance practices. The discourse of these voices in this ethnographic investigation of UK-based South Asian community dance not only exposes these particular traditions to a wider audience, enabling a richer understanding to grow, but also places them in the extended international field of dance scholarship. This work too feeds into other major disciplines such as sociology, cultural studies, folklore and religious studies and offers fresh insights into the place of ethnicity, identity, community and aspects of cultural transmission through the study of dance.

The discovery, documentation and analysis of the rich vein of Hindu community dance practices that are the vehicle for the articulation of questions of identity, ethnicity, authenticity and religious beliefs in a diasporic setting in Britain contributes to the dissolution of the alterity of the colonialist legacy by providing detailed knowledge from the both the inside and the outside of the community. This detailed understanding of how people perform their faith and the contested issues surrounding it, redresses the balance of neglect and marginalisation of community and non-western dance forms common in academic debate and in under-representation in dance scholarship. It adds to the global debate and interest in South Asian dance forms and cultural representation that is rapidly growing. Finally, it speaks of a past that is being transmuted in the present, evolving, growing, and at an important moment of transition.

NOTES:

¹ I am aware of Zarrilli's dissatisfaction with this terminology, critiquing it for its sense of culture as a fixed essence rather than 'the fluid process of creating meaning characteristic of any act of performance' (1998:255). He prefers to use the term 'mode of cultural praxis' (ibid:254).

² An example of this is found at the Shree Ghanapathy Temple in Wimbledon where the son and daughters of the founder of the temple now assist their mother in the financial, organisational and cultural running of the temple. Geetha, in her thirties, arranges the children's classes in Tamil, Hinduism, Bharatanatyam and classical music, and she is concerned that they have a good 'spiritual' education at the temple. The classes were started originally when devotees at the temple asked for them, and are mainly offered for the 4-15 year olds. The older teenagers are encouraged to help with the classes (author's fieldnotes 15.1.03).

³ Ram admits to experiencing the 'magical assuaging of immigrant anxieties' despite all her intellectual training when she watched her seven year old daughter performing Bharatanatyam in full costume on stage in Australia (2000:265). This is underlined by Blackburn when he writes that 'the performative presence is sometimes so visually and aurally powerful that it appears to silence our critical faculties' (1998:4).

⁴ 'Asian Kool' –see Sharma et al 1996.

Saldanha writes of the youth culture in Bangalore, India, where for the wealthy youth 'driving around is a very urban, very modern, very non-Indian matter' (2002:341). Playing loud western pop music is an essential ingredient of the experience, adding to the excitement of driving around with no particular destination. This of course, can also be seen in the streets in Leicester and London.

⁵ These girls interviewed attended dance classes at the London Sri Murugan Temple in East Ham. Their teacher commented that they came from a variety of backgrounds; some parents are professionals – doctors, accountants, teachers and others own their businesses, such as shops.

⁶ Zee TV-Europe is a 'non-terrestrial television channel that caters for viewers of the South Asian Diaspora found across Western Europe' (Dudrah 2002b:163) and started broadcasting in 1995 after taking over from the TV Asia channel. There are two other channels in South Asia – Zee Cinema and Zee India that form part of its network.

⁷ I note John Eade's critique here of the term 'host' in discussions of identity as it implies the corresponding word 'guest'. 'The host/guest analogy suggests that migrants may just be temporary visitors, dependant on the good will of the majority' (2004:10). Eade proposes a more useful term of 'partner', a word that gives a sense of an equal meeting ground.

⁸ In an interview, the director of the London Tamil Centre spoke of the dichotomy facing his generation of Tamil settlers. He completed his PhD in the UK in the late 1960s and then returned home to Sri Lanka, but settled in London in 1972 because of the escalating discrimination against Tamils there. He wanted his children to have a good education, so his son went to Eton and his daughters gained degrees at LSE (London School of Economics), and are now very successful economists in their late 20s and early 30s. But he said, 'At what price? They are not interested in getting married and are really typically British'. Although he sees himself as liberal-minded, he does regret the loss of family values and traditions in the second generation, and so set out to remedy this by starting a Tamil Sunday School to provide tuition in their culture and language. This was established in 1990 and now has nearly 400 children attending. Many subjects, including music and dance are offered at a subsidised rate, and Tamil language lessons are free. In dance, both the ISTD exam system and the Tamil Academy of fine Arts are used, the ISTD

being valued for its 'English' certificates. Bharatanatyam is the only dance style taught (interview 4.10.03).

⁹ In 1931, India's first sound film borrowed both structure and music from the plays of the Parsee Theatre. The music included a number of songs based on Hindustani light-classical music (Kabir 2001). For many years now, the film songs have become *the* popular music of the Indian subcontinent (see also Farrell et al. 2005).

¹⁰ *Pop Idol* ran on ITV for two series in 2002 and 2003 and was a highly successful blend of traditional talent show and reality TV. Its format has been launched in over a dozen nations worldwide. Fifty contestants were selected from 10,000 applications. *Fame Academy* ran on the BBC between 2003-2005, with two major and two specialist series. It too drew thousands of applicants from all over the UK. These two shows focussed on pop singing and song writing. *Strictly Dance Fever* was shown in 2005 and was a competitive dance series for couples in popular styles.

¹¹ Although some practitioners, like Kumar Shaswat who runs his own school of music and dance in Leicester (SAMPA) prefer to remain financially self-sufficient and therefore independent of local and national politics (see Chapter Four).

¹² The Balinese language does not have simply one word for the widespread phenomenon known as 'trance'. Several terms are used: 'karauhan kalinggihan', 'kalinggaan', 'kodal', or 'tedun'. These may be translated in different ways, such as 'a (temporary) loss of the soul' or 'a state with another spirit other than your own' –'rauh' being the Balinese word for spirit.

Appendix 1:

List of fieldwork visits to Hindu temples and Hindu festivals, South Asian dance performances, dance classes in temples and at festivals. General fieldwork visits related to research project.

1. Visits to Hindu temples - Saivite and Vaishnavite: (in alphabetical order)

London

Hare Krishna Temple (ISKCON), central London: one visit – 7.2.02.

Highgatehill Murugan Temple, Archway: two visits made – 15.11.01 and 11.3.02.

London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, East Ham: three visits made between 1.10.03 and 6.11.04.

London Sri Murugan Temple, East Ham: eleven visits made between 13.2.03 and 22.5.05.

Maha Lakshmi Mandir and Vidya Bhavan, Forest Hill: one visit - 14.10.01.

Shree Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon: eleven visits made between 8.12.01 and 27.3.05.

Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden: five visits made between 12.10.02 and 16.10.04.

Sri Kanagathurkkai Amman Temple, Ealing: five visits made between 29.6.02 and 24.10.03.

Sri Muthumari Temple, Tooting: one visit - 1.1.04.

Sri Thiruthanigai Murugan Temple, Surbiton: three visits between 28.7.03 and 26.2.05.

Leicester

Jain Centre: two visits made – 15.2.02 and 12.5.02.

Shree Jalaram Prarthana Mandal: one visit – 17.3.02.

Shree Sanatan Mandir: three visits made between 29.5.02 and 2.7.05.

Swaminarayan Hindu Mission: one visit - 15.2.02.

Other

Hare Krishna Temple (ISKCON), Bhaktivedanta Manor, Watford: one visit – 6.5.02.

2. Hindu religious festivals visited:

London

Navratri: 25.10.01; 10.10.02, 11.10.02, 19.10.02; 28.9.03, 30.9.03, 1.10.03, 3.10.03; 16.10.04, 22.10.04, 23.10.04.

Diwali: 15.11.01.

Mahasivaratri: 11.3.02, 12.3.02.

Ram Navami: 21.4.02.

‘Ther’ Chariot Festival: 18.8.02, 21.8.02; 25.7.04.

Poongavanam: 21.8.02.

Raksha Bandana Puja: 22.8.02.

Tai Pusam: 5.2.04.

Leicester

Mela: 13.7.02, 14.7.02; 12.7.03

Mahasivaratri: 17.3.02

Navratri: 9.10.02, 10.10.02; 5.10.03.

Dashera: 15.10.02

Ratha Yatra: 27.7.03

3. Dance performances attended in temples or at Hindu religious festivals:
(in date order)

London

Maha Lakshmi Mandir and Vidya Bhavan: 14.10.01 (Charity event).
Shree Ghanapathy Temple: 8.12.01 (Founder's Day).
Highgatehill Murugan Temple: 11.3.02 (*Mahasivaratri*).
Bhavan Centre: 12.3.02 (*Mahasivaratri*).
Bhavan Centre: 21.4.02 (*Ram Navami*).
Sri Kanagathurkkai Amman Temple: 11.8.02 ('*Ther*' Chariot Festival).
Shree Ghanapathy Temple: 18.8.02 ('*Ther*' Chariot Festival).
Cannon Leisure Centre, Mitcham (Patel Association): 11.10.02 (*Navratri*).
Shree Swaminarayan Mandir: 12.10.02 (*Navratri*).
Shree Ghanapathy Temple: 28.9.03 and 30.9.03 (*Navratri*).
London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple: 1.10.03 (*Navratri*).
London Sri Murugan Temple: 3.10.03 (*Navratri*).
Sri Muthumari Temple: 1.1.04 (New Year's Day).
London Sri Murugan Temple: 5.2.04 (*Tai Pusam*).
Shree Ghanapathy Temple: 25.7.04 ('*Ther*' Chariot festival).
Shree Swaminarayan Mandir: 16.10.04 (*Navratri*).
Sri Thiruthanigai Murugan Temple: 22.10.04 (*Navratri*).
London Sri Mahalakshmi Temple: 23.10.04 (*Navratri*).

Leicester

Rushey Mead School (Hindu Religion Study Group): 17.3.02 (*Mahasivaratri*).
Abbey Primary School: 9.10.02 (*Navratri*).
De Montfort Hall: 9.10.02 (*Navratri*).
Ramgarhia Hall: 10.10.02 (*Navratri*).
Cossingham Street Playing Fields: 27.7.03 (*Ratha Yatra*).
Shree Sanatan Mandir: 28.7.03 (*Raas/Garba* practice)
De Montfort Hall: 7.9.03 (*Raas/Garba* Dance Competition).
De Montfort Hall: 10.10.03 (*Sharad Purnima*).
Shree Sanatan Mandir: 2.7.05 (Performance of dance by *Kalai Kaviri*)

4. South Asian dance classes attended: (in date order)

London

Bharatanatyam dance classes at Shree Ghanapathy Temple taught by Chitra Somasundaram, 18.12.01; 4.3.02.

Bharatanatyam dance classes at Shree Ghanapathy Temple taught by Vinothini Shanmuganathan, 7.7.02; 24.1.03.

Bharatanatyam dance classes at London Sri Murugan Temple taught by Pathmini Gunasingham, 28.9.03; 12.10.03; 30.11.03; 24.4.05.

Bharatanatyam dance classes at Harrow Tamil School taught by Uma Chandratheva, 8.11.03.

Kathak master classes and workshop at Royal Opera House, taught by Kumudini Lakhia, 24.8.04.

Leicester

Kathak dance classes taught by Nilima Devi, 14.5.03;

Kathak and Bollywood dance classes taught by Nayana Whittacker, 14.5.03.

Bharatanatyam and Bollywood dance classes taught by Smita Vadnerkar, 11.7.03.

Bharatanatyam and Bollywood dance classes taught by Vaidehi Pancholi, July 2002 and 4.7.03.

Dance practice for *Raas/Garba* Competition at Shree Sanatan Mandir taught by Hema Archarya, 28.7.03.

5. Professional performances of South Asian dance, theatre and film attended: (in date order)

27.9.01 – Mavin Khoo, Chitra Sundaram (Bharatanatyam): Clore Studio, Royal Opera House (ROH), London.

27.10.01 – Malavika Sarukkai (Bharatanatyam): Nehru Centre, London.

27.4.02 - *Journey to the West* (play by Tara Arts): Birmingham.

10.5.02 – Vena Ramphal (Bharatanatyam): October Gallery, London.

14.6.02 – Kapila Vatsayan (seminar on South Asian dance): Nehru Centre.

31.7.02 – *Bollywood Dreams* (Asian musical): Apollo Victoria Theatre, London.

19.7.02 – Menaka and Indira Bora (Bharatanatyam and Sattriya): Nehru Centre.

22.7.02- Mohini Attam: Nehru Centre.

29.8.02 - *Devdas* (Bollywood film): London.

20.9.02 -Vena Ramphal and Mavin Khoo (Bharatanatyam and contemporary): Greenwich Dance Agency, London.

2.10.02 - Mavin Khoo (lecture/ workshop): Roehampton University, London.

23.10.02 - Nahid Siddiqui (Kathak): Purcell Room, London.

3.11.02 – Gauri Sharma Tripathi and Sandhya Purecha (Kathak and Bharatanatyam): Bhavan Centre, London.

2.12.02 - Mavin Khoo, Chitra Sundaram, Pushkala Gopal (Bharatanatyam): Nehru Centre.

10.1.03 - *Midnight's Children* (by Salman Rushdie): Barbican, London.

3.2.03 – Vena Ramphal (Bharatanatyam and contemporary): The Place, London.

22.2.03 – Sita Nandakumar (Bharatanatyam) : Bhavan Centre.

8.3.03 - Chitra Sundaram (Bharatanatyam): Watermans Arts Centre.

19.3.03 - *Zodiac* (South Asian dance project by Alpana Sengupta and school children): Leicester Haymarket.

22.3.03 – *Utsava* (South Asian dance community project): Richard Attenborough Studio, Leicester.

3.5.03 - *Shift* (Sushma Mehta group - Kathak): Watermans Arts Centre.

1.5.03 – Events for Rukmini Devi centennial celebrations: Nehru Centre.

8.6.03 – Birju Maharaj (Kathak): Queen Elizabeth Hall, London.

10.6.03 – Nilima Devi (Kathak fusion): Nehru Centre.

18.6.03 –Mavin Khoo (Lecture/demonstration): Roehampton University.

9.7.03 - *South* (Story telling and Bharatanatyam by Vayu Naidu Company): Linbury Studio, ROH.

10.7.03 – *Tribute to Ram Gopal* (Bharatanatyam and Kathakali): National Portrait Gallery, London.

31.7.03 – *Brhannala* (dance drama): Riverside Studios, London.

24.8.03 – *Escapade* (Akademi outdoor dance event): South Bank, London.

7.9.03 - Raas/Garba Dance Competition: De Montfort Hall, Leicester.

9.9.03 – *I-Together* (Bharatanatyam): Linbury Studio, ROH.

17.9.03 – *Urjah* (cross-cultural dance collaboration): Richard Attenborough Centre, Leicester.

19.9.03 – *Dance Like A Man* (Asian drama): Watermans Arts Centre.

7.11.03 - *Radha* (Odissi): Wandsworth Arts Festival, London.

16.1.04 – *Lord Siva Danced* (film screening of Ram Gopal and Company): Nehru Centre.

7.2.04 – *Strictly Dandia* (Asian drama on Raas/ Garba dance): Lyric Theatre, London.

24.3.04 – *Transtep*: Shobana Jeyasingh Company: The Place, London.

19.6.04 – Kalai Kaviri (Bharatanatyam): Catholic Mass, St. Margaret's Church, Twickenham.

14.8.04 - *Waterscapes* (Kathak): Somerset House, London.

16.8.04 – Saswati Sen (Kathak): Nehru Centre.

20.8.04 – Kumudini Lakhia and Mavin Khoo in conversation: Nehru Centre.

5.9.04 – *Ekatra*: Kumudini Lakhia choreography: Sadlers' Wells.

11.9.04 – *Ekatra*: Performance of above: Clore Studio, ROH.

6.10.04 – *Ta –the Beginning*: Gauri Sharma and Company (Kathak): Purcell Room, London.

1.12.04 – *Ma*: Akram Khan Company (Kathak and contemporary): Queen Elizabeth Hall, London.

23.2.05 – *Red*: Sonia Sabri Company (Kathak): Purcell Room.

12.4.05 – *Third Catalogue*: Akram Khan Company: Purcell Room.

25.6.05 – *New: Currents*: Clore Studio, ROH, London.

28.6.05 – *Classical New Indian Dance*: Nina Rajarani and Sushmita Ghosh: Riverside Studio, London.

12.7.05 – *Zero Degrees*: Akram Khan Company: Sadler's Wells.

28.7.05 – *Litany*: Magdalen Gorringe: Jerwood Space, London.

9.9.05 – *Raga Rang, Nritya Sangam*: Y Theatre, Leicester.

10.9.05 – *Sankalpam*, and *Kathak duet*: Y Theatre, Leicester.

6. Arangetrams attended (in date order)

14.9.03 – Bharatanatyam arangetram: Fairfield Halls, Croydon.

27.9.03 - Bharatanatyam arangetram: Logan Hall, London.

3.7.04 - Bharatanatyam arangetram: Logan Hall, London.

7. Conferences and lectures attended: (in date order)

24.3.02 – *South Asian Aesthetics Unwrapped*: Conference at ROH, London.

16.11.02 - *Writing on Dance*: Conference at the Laban Centre, London.

7.11.02-8.11.02 – *Connecting Flights: Diaspora*: Conference at British Library, London.

8.10.03 –12.11.03 – *Understanding Hinduism*: series of six lectures at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) University of London.

24.1.04 – *Dance Ethnography Forum*: De Montfort University, Leicester.

31.1.04 – *Body, Dance, Performative Practices Symposium*: Goldsmith's College, University of London.

19.3.04 – *The Politics of Choreography: Bharata Natyam in Global Performance*: lecture given at SOAS, London by Dr.J.O'Shea.

14.5.04 – *Engagements with Tradition in the Gujarati World* :one day conference at SOAS, London.

20.5.04 – Talk on the politics of Gujarat: Mallika Sarabhai, London.

30.9.04 – *Let's Talk*: Discussion day on South Asian Dance, Peepul Project, Leicester.

7.10.04 – *Let's Talk* : Discussion day on Community Dance, Peepul Project, Leicester.

11.10.04- 15.11.04 – *Hindus in the Diaspora* : Professor Pratap Kumar, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford (series of six lectures).

27.3.05 – *Saivism Today*: Talk given by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami at Wimbledon Ghanapathy Temple.

10.9.05 *Nartan Festival Conference* (Centre for Indian Classical Dance), Leicester.

8. Other fieldwork visits made: (in date order)

London

Trading Places – the East India Company and Asia. Exhibition at British Library, 10.5.02.

Swaminarayan School, Neasden, 26.3.03.

Mapping India. Exhibition at Atlantis Gallery, London, 25.10.03.

Leicester

ImaginAsian project. Leicester libraries, 18.2.02.

Meeting God – Elements of Personal Devotion in India. Exhibition at New Walk Museum, 22.4.02.

Centre for Urban History, 29.5.02.

Blueprints for Peace. Religious symposiums in association with Haymarket Theatre, 29.5.02.

Shakti – Power of the Divine Feminine in India. illustrated talk by Dr S. Huyler, New Walk Museum, 13.8.02.

Abbey Primary School, 9.10.02.

Rushey Mead School, 12.11.02.

Leicester Mercury Archives, 14.5.03.

Focus on Assam. Exhibition at New Walk Museum, 24.8.03.

Art of Bollywood Dance. Exhibition at New Walk Museum, 2.7.05.

Appendix 2:

List of interviews conducted in person and by telephone.

London:

1. Alagrajah, Dr P: president of Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, East Ham. Face to face interview at Mahalakshmi temple: 6.11.04.
2. Chandratheva, Uma: senior dance teacher at Harrow Tamil Sunday School. Face to face interviews at the School and her home: 9.11.03 and 25.1.04.
3. Clarke, Ray: dance photographer. Correspondence by letter: 10.10.01.
4. Dance students at Murugan temple, East Ham: Face to face interviews and questionnaires: 30.11.03.
5. Gheerawo, Kumarie: teacher at Swaminarayan School. Telephone conversations: 15.11.01 and 16.11.01.
6. Gopal, Pushkala: professional Bharatanatyam dancer, musician, and teacher. Face to face interview in restaurant (she is co-owner): 12.3.03.
7. Gorringe, Magdalen: Bharatanatyam dancer. Face to face interviews at her home: 5.10.01 and 20.8.03.
8. Gossai, Bankim: senior priest at Mahalakshmi Temple, Forest Hill. Face to face interview at Mahalakshmi temple: 14.10.01.
9. Gunaseelan, Padmini: Bharatanatyam teacher at Murugan temple, East Ham. Face to face interview at Murugan temple: 10.3.03. Telephone interview: 28.9.03.
10. Khan, Akram: professional Kathak dancer and choreographer. Telephone interview: 25.10.04
11. Lakhia, Kumudini: professional choreographer, Kathak dancer and teacher (based in India). Face to face interview at her London accommodation: 22.8.04.
12. Maheshwaran, Geetha: trustee and organiser, Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon. Face to face interview at her home: 15.1.03. Telephone interview: 16.8.02.
13. Naganada Kurkhai Sivam, senior priest at Murugan temple, East Ham. Face to face interview at Murugan temple (recorded on video): 13.2.03.

14. Nandakumar, Dr: director of Bhavan Centre, face to face interview at the Bhavan Centre: 29.1.01.
15. Niththyananthan, Dr. R.: director of London Tamil Centre. Face to face interview in his home: 4.10.03.
16. Patel, Nina and Sarish: organisers of Gujarati Navratri festival. Face to face interviews at Navratri events: 25.10.01, 28.10.01. Telephone interview: 12.10.02.
17. Patel, Ramanbhai: teacher of Gujarati. Telephone interview: 28.10.03.
18. Quincy, Charles Kendall: Kathak dancer. Telephone interview: 12.9.04
19. Rajesh, Shubadha: professional Odissi dancer (based in India). Face to face interview at her London accommodation: 16.10.01.
20. Ramphal (Gheerawo), Vena: Bharatanatyam dancer and academic. Email correspondence and telephone conversations: 27.11.01 and 28.3.02.
21. Sampathkumar, S: president of Murugan temple, East Ham. Face to face interview at Murugan temple: 15.10.03.
22. Sarker, Bisakha: professional South Asian dancer and teacher. Telephone interview: 16.10.01.
23. Shambu, Shane: professional Bharatanatyam dancer. Face to face interview in Gorrings' home: 20.8.03 .Telephone interview: 25.9.03.
24. Shanmuganathan, Vinothini: Bharatanatyam dance teacher at Ghanapathy temple, Wimbledon. Face to face interviews at Ghanapathy temple: 7.7.02, 24.1.03. Telephone interview: 24.10.03.
25. Sivesan, Sivasakti: professional Karnatic singer and music teacher at Bhavan Centre. Face to face interviews in her home: 22.1.03 and 11.3.03.
26. Sivajoti, L: senior trustee of Murugan temple, East Ham. Face to face interview at Murugan temple: 15.10.03.
27. Somasundaram, Chitra: Bharatanatyam dance teacher at Ghanapathy temple, Wimbledon and Murugan temple, Surbiton. Face to face interview at Ghanapathy temple: 18.12.01. Telephone interview: 4.3.02.
28. Thevasagayam: senior trustee of Amman Temple, Ealing. Face to face interview at Amman temple: 21.10.03.

29. Unnikrishnan: professional Bharatanatyam and Kathakali dancer and teacher. Telephone interview: 10.3.03.

30. Vikash, participant in Tai Pusam festival. Face to face interview at author's home: 22.2.04.

Leicester:

1. Brown, Cynthia: head of East Midlands Oral History Archives. Face to face interview at the Centre for Urban History: 29.5.02.
2. Candler, Mike: Head of Arts and Leisure, Leicester City Council. Face to face interview at his office: 10.10.03.
3. Dance students, Leicester: Face to face interviews and questionnaires during *Uttisava* rehearsals: 22.3.03.
4. Devi, Nilima: professional Kathak dance and director of Centre for Indian Classical Dance. Face to face interviews in her home: 16.2.02, 9.10.02 and 22.3.03.
5. Gohil, Amisha: young student dancer. Face to face interview at the Leicester Mela: 13.7.02.
6. Kumar, Dipak and Kiran: Sai Baba devotees. Face to face interviews in their home: 9.10.02 and 15.10.02.
7. Mehta, Dr Sashi: trustee of Jain Temple. Face to face interview at the Jain temple: 11.5.02.
8. Odedra, Akash: professional Kathak dancer. Telephone interview: 12.9.04.
9. Pancholi, Vaidehi: Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher. Face to face interview at the Belgrave Centre: 12.7.02.
10. Parmar, Nimisha: dancer and teacher. Face to face interview in coffee shop: 11.7.03.
11. Patel, Archana: student at De Montfort University. Face to face interview at her grandparents' house: 10.12.01. Telephone conversation: 15.2.02.
12. Patel, Maganbhai: president of Gujarat Hindu Association. Face to face interview at the Association's offices: 18.8.03.

13. Raithatha, Priti: professional dance teacher and singer, and director of Institute of Contemporary South Asian Dance. Face to face interview at her home: 18.2.02.
14. Ranawayaya, Pratap: organiser of Shruti Arts. Face to face interview in office of Shruti Arts: 14.5.03.
15. Salwan, Indar: chairman of Hindu Religion Study Group. Telephone interview 15.3.02.
16. Shashwat, Kumar: director of SAMPA (Shashwat Academy of Music and Performing Arts). Face to face interview at his academy: 11.7.03.
17. Sood, Councillor Manjula: Leicester City Council. Face to face interview at her home: 14.5.03.
18. Students at Rushey Mead School: Face to face interviews and questionnaires at their school. 12.11.02
19. Vadnerkar, Smita: Bharatanatyam and folk dancer and teacher. Face to face interview at her home: 10.10.02
20. Vaidya, Dr. Ram: President of Hindu Association. Face to face interview at the Association's offices: 17.10.01.
21. Walia, Urvi: Kathak dancer and teacher. Face to face interview at her home: 12.5.02.
22. White, Steve: retired headmaster, Rushey Mead School. Face to face interview at School: 29.5.02.
23. Whittaker, Nayana: professional Kathak and folk dancer, and teacher. Face to face interviews at her home: 12.5.02 and 28.7.03.

Appendix 3:

Glossary of Sanskrit, Tamil and Gujarati terms

I have used a simplified form of transliteration for the glossary without resorting to the use of diacritical marks, and have selected the common anglicised form of the word in most cases. This does create a certain inconsistency in the use, for example, of 's', where the pronunciation is 'sh'. Therefore 'Siva' is given rather than 'Shiva', although other less common words are spelt 'sh' to assist the reader. I have also made use of the anglicised spellings as used in the temples, such as 'Shree', or in other cases 'Sri.

<i>Abhinaya</i>	Mime or expressive aspect of Indian classical dance.
<i>Abisheka</i>	'Anointing' or bathing of deity with various substances, mainly liquid.
<i>ACE</i>	Arts Council of England.
<i>Adavu</i>	Basic dance steps in Bharatanatyam.
<i>ADiTi</i>	A national organisation for South Asian dance based in Bradford, UK.
<i>Akademi</i>	Academy of Indian Dance, UK, established in London in 1979 by dancer Tara Rajkumar.
<i>Akopparul</i>	Ancient Tamil grammatical treatise.
<i>Alaku</i>	Piercing of the body in Tamil devotional practice.
<i>Alarippu</i>	First major dance item in Bharatanatyam repertoire.
<i>Amba</i>	Name of goddess Durga as mother.
<i>Amman, amma</i>	Mother, goddess; used for name of divine feminine force.
<i>Anga suddhi</i>	Correct use of the body in <i>Kathak</i> dance.
<i>Aramandi</i>	Basic position of Bharatanatyam, like a demi-plié.
<i>Arangetram</i>	Debut performance of a Bharatanatyam dancer.

<i>Arati, arti</i>	Waving of camphor or oil lamps before the deity as an act of worship.
<i>Archana</i>	Personal worship of the deity.
<i>Ardhamandapam</i>	Half-way hall in South Indian temple.
<i>Ashadha</i>	Hindu month falling between mid-June and mid-July.
<i>Ashubha</i>	Inauspicious.
<i>Ashuddha</i>	Impurity.
<i>Astanga pranayama</i>	Bow in front of deity performed by men in which eight points of the body are in contact with the ground.
<i>Asvin</i>	Month in the Hindu calendar falling mid-September to mid-October.
<i>Atharvaveda</i>	One of the four ancient books of hymns that are the scriptural foundation of Hinduism.
<i>Attam</i>	Dance.
<i>Bayadères</i>	Old name for Hindu temple-dancers; a French corruption from the Portuguese <i>bailadeira</i> meaning 'dancing girl'.
<i>Bhadra</i>	Hindu month falling mid-August and mid-September.
<i>Bhajan</i>	Religious devotional song.
<i>Bhakti</i>	Devotion, love. One of the three central paths of Hinduism, the other two being <i>Jnana</i> , knowledge and <i>Karma</i> , action.
<i>Bhangra</i>	Lively male folk dance from the Punjab.
<i>Bharatanatyam</i>	South Indian classical dance style.
<i>Bhavana</i>	Feeling, emotion.
<i>Bollywood dance</i>	Hybrid dance genre evolved in Indian cinema.
<i>Brahma</i>	One of the three main Hindu deities, believed to be the creative force in the universe.
<i>Brahman</i>	The highest being, absolute consciousness.

<i>Brahmin</i>	The highest caste in Hinduism, the priestly caste.
<i>Camattiya kaliyanam</i>	‘Attainment festivity’; celebration of girl’s menarche.
<i>CEMA</i>	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts.
<i>Centamil</i>	Pure, auspicious form of Tamil.
<i>Chaitra</i>	Hindu month falling between March and April.
<i>Chakra</i>	Wheel or discus; one of the weapons of deity Vishnu; centre of subtle energy in human body.
<i>Chaniyo</i>	Long decorative skirt worn by Gujarati women.
<i>Chinnamelam</i>	‘Small drums’; small orchestra that played during temple worship in south India.
<i>Choli</i>	Short blouse worn under <i>sari</i> or with long skirt.
<i>Chuddidar</i>	Tunic top and trousers worn by women, like <i>salwar kamiz</i> .
<i>Chunri</i>	Decorative scarf worn over <i>choli</i> and <i>chaniyo</i> .
<i>CICD</i>	Centre for Indian Classical Dance (Leicester).
<i>Dalits</i>	The ‘untouchable’ caste.
<i>Dandia, dandiya</i>	Wooden sticks used in <i>raas</i> , or <i>dandia raas</i> folk dance.
<i>Darshan</i>	Witnessing and being witnessed by the deity; central part of Hindu worship.
<i>Dashera</i>	Tenth and final day of the <i>Navratri</i> festival which acknowledges the triumph of good over evil.
<i>Dasi Attam</i>	Original name of classical Bharatanatyam dance form.
<i>Davni</i>	A long skirt and half-sari worn by young girls between 13-16, indicating she has left childhood, but is not yet a mature woman.
<i>Desi</i>	Of the country, provincial – often used to describe Indian folk dance as opposed to <i>margi</i> . In colloquial use the term now means a fellow Indian, or anything related to India.

<i>Devadasi</i>	Original temple dancers of South India.
<i>Devi</i>	Female aspect of the divine
<i>Dhobis</i>	Washermen and women.
<i>Dhol</i>	Indian wooden drum, played with fingers at both ends.
<i>Dhyana</i>	Meditation; contemplation.
<i>Diwali</i>	A pan-Indian festival of lights celebrated in late autumn.
<i>DMK</i>	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam –an independent political Tamil movement, founded in 1949.
<i>Dodhiu</i>	Fast <i>Garba</i> variation.
<i>Durga</i>	One of the many names of the feminine force of the divine; this name particularly refers to her more ferocious aspect.
<i>Durga puja</i>	A pan-Indian festival dedicated to the goddess <i>Durga</i> .
<i>Filmi</i>	Another name for Bollywood film dance.
<i>Ganapati, Ghanapathy</i> <i>Ganesha</i>	Names of the elephant-headed deity, said to be the son of deity <i>Siva</i> .
<i>Garabi</i>	Central shrine at <i>Navratri</i> festival.
<i>Garba, garaba</i>	Names of clapping folk dances played at <i>Navratri</i> .
<i>Garba griha</i>	The inner sanctum or ‘womb-house’ of the temple where the deity is installed.
<i>Garbo</i>	Name of an earthenware pot with holes, used usually as a lamp.
<i>Giddha</i>	Punjabi women’s folk dance .
<i>Gopis</i>	‘Cow- herders’ (women) who worshipped and followed the deity Krishna.
<i>Gopura</i>	The highly decorated gate-tower of a south Indian temple.
<i>Griva</i>	Limbs.

<i>Guna(s)</i>	'Quality'; three principal elements governing the created world.
<i>Gurdwara</i>	A Sikh temple.
<i>Guru</i>	Teacher or spiritual guide.
<i>Gurukkal</i>	Tamil word for priest.
<i>Gurukula</i>	The guru's home where a disciple would stay; traditional system of teaching between <i>guru</i> and disciple.
<i>Guru-shishya</i>	Teacher and disciple.
<i>Hare Krishna</i>	Lord Krishna; chant used by ISKCON devotees.
<i>Harijans</i>	'God's people' –name given to the 'untouchable' caste by Gandhi.
<i>Hastas</i>	Hand gestures used in dance.
<i>Heench</i>	<i>Garba</i> variation with half-turns and full-turns.
<i>Hindutva</i>	Concept developed in the 1930s to indicate 'Hindu-ness' - a sense of Hindu identity distinct from a Hindu religious identity.
<i>Holi</i>	A lively pan-Indian spring festival where coloured water is thrown at participants in celebration.
<i>Hommam</i>	Ritual fire sacrifice.
<i>Isai Vellala</i>	Name of hereditary temple musicians in south India.
<i>ISKCON</i>	International Society for Krishna Consciousness.
<i>Jain, Jinas</i>	Jinas are spiritual prophets and their followers are Jains.
<i>Jhattkas/Matkars</i>	A slang Hindi term for the movement of the hips and pelvis in film dance that implies using the dance movements as a form of seduction.
<i>Jati</i>	Birth-group; Hindu subcaste.
<i>Jatiswaram</i>	A pure dance item in Bharatanatyam.

<i>Kaherva</i>	Eight-beat musical time-cycle used for <i>Raas</i> and <i>Garba</i> .
<i>Kalakshetra</i>	Name of famous traditional dance school outside Chennai in south India, founded by Rukmini Devi.
<i>Kalavantalu</i>	‘Receptacles of the arts’, <i>devadasis</i> .
<i>Kanagathurkkai</i>	Golden, or benign Durga.
<i>Karana</i>	Term from <i>Natyashastra</i> for synchronised dance movement of hands and feet.
<i>Karnatic</i>	Style of traditional music from south India.
<i>Kathak</i>	Classical dance style from northern India.
<i>Kathakali</i>	Dance-drama form from Kerala, south India.
<i>Kartikeya</i>	Name of deity Murugan.
<i>Kavadi</i>	Male ecstatic dance performed by Tamil devotees for deity Murugan; name of wooden structure male devotees carry on their shoulders during festivities.
<i>Khalsa Panth</i>	‘Community of pure ones’; founded in the Sikh tradition in 1699.
<i>Kotuntamil</i>	‘Bent, uneven’; everyday spoken Tamil.
<i>Krishna</i>	Name of popular deity, incarnation of deity Vishnu.
<i>Kriya</i>	Action.
<i>Kuchil</i>	Small dark room for segregating menstruating women in south India.
<i>Kumkum</i>	A red powder, normally worn by married women on their forehead, made from lime and turmeric.
<i>Kummi</i>	Circular folk dances performed by Tamil women at menarche celebrations.
<i>Kurta</i>	Loose shirt top worn by men over trousers.
<i>Linga</i>	Aniconic form for worshipping deity Siva.

<i>LTTE</i>	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.
<i>Magashirsha</i>	Hindu month falling between mid-November and mid-December.
<i>Magha</i>	Hindu month falling between mid-January and mid-February.
<i>Mahakali</i>	The 'great' goddess Kali.
<i>Mahakumbhabhishekam</i>	Grand rituals consecrating a new temple.
<i>Mahalakshmi</i>	The 'great' goddess Lakshmi, consort of Vishnu.
<i>Mahasivaratri</i>	'Great night of Siva'; annual all-night festival worshipping Siva.
<i>Mahavir</i>	Jain festival in April.
<i>Mallavi</i>	Musical item played on <i>Nagaswaram</i> .
<i>Mandapa</i>	Multi-pillared hall in front of a Hindu temple's inner sanctum.
<i>Mandir</i>	'Mansion'; common term for temple in North India.
<i>Margam</i>	Traditional concert order of a Bharatanatyam performance.
<i>Margi</i>	Term used to describe classical Indian dance, meaning 'high or proper course'.
<i>Mataji</i>	Mother, or goddess praised as 'mother'.
<i>Meenakshi</i>	Name of goddess who is the 'wife' of deity Siva.
<i>Mela</i>	Gathering; fair; Hindu festival.
<i>Mher</i>	Warrior community of the Saurashtra region of Gujarat.
<i>Mohini Attam</i>	Classical dance style from Kerala, south India.
<i>Moksha</i>	Liberation, freedom from worldly ties.
<i>Mrdangam</i>	South Indian two-headed drum used in <i>Karnatic</i> music.
<i>Mudra</i>	Hand gesture used in ritual worship.

<i>Murti</i>	The presence of the deity in image form.
<i>Murugan</i>	Tamil deity, son of deity Siva.
<i>Muttamil</i>	Definition of the Tamil language with a three-fold aspect: word, music and dance.
<i>Nagaswaram</i>	Traditional reed instrument played in temple ritual and at other celebrations and festivals.
<i>Namaskar</i>	Dedication/bow used in greeting, and performed in a stylised manner before commencing dance practice or performance.
<i>Nataraj</i>	Siva in the form of 'Lord/God of the dance'.
<i>Nattuvanar</i>	Musician/dance teacher conducting dance performance who plays the cymbals and speaks the rhythmic syllables for the dancer.
<i>Natya</i>	Dance or drama.
<i>Natyashastra</i>	Ancient treatise setting out codified system for dance and drama.
<i>Nautch</i>	North Indian term for dance.
<i>Navratri</i>	'Nine nights'- a pan-Indian Hindu festival celebrating the feminine power of <i>Shakti</i> in all her forms. It falls in the autumn at a slightly different time each year, as it is calculated according to the Hindu lunar calendar. The Gujaratis in particular celebrate with nine nights of folk dancing as described and often call it by the Gujarati name of <i>Norta</i> .
<i>Nritta</i>	Pure dance aspect of the classical forms.
<i>Nritya mandapa</i>	Dancing hall within the ancient Hindu temples.
<i>Odissi</i>	Classical dance style originating from state of Orissa.
<i>Pada</i>	Step; foot.
<i>Padam</i>	A slow, lyrical Bharatanatyam dance item interpreting a poem or story.

<i>Pakhawaj</i>	A two-handed drum used in North Indian classical music and dance, and an older form of the <i>tabla</i> drum.
<i>Pal kudam</i>	Pot of milk carried on a woman devotee's head as an offering to deity Murugan during <i>Tai Pusam</i> .
<i>Panchapuranam</i>	Tradition of sacred hymns sung in temple as part of worship.
<i>Paramatman</i>	The most supreme or highest Self or <i>Atman</i> .
<i>Parampara</i>	Tradition or succession.
<i>Patidar</i>	Name of Gujarati caste more commonly known as Patel.
<i>Pausha</i>	Name of Hindu month falling mid-December to mid-January.
<i>Periamelam</i>	'Big drums' –larger orchestra playing in temple and in outside processions in south India.
<i>Phalgun</i>	Name of Hindu month falling mid-February to mid-March.
<i>Pillaiyar</i>	Name of Ganapati or Ganesha.
<i>Pranam</i>	Dedicatory bow or offering in Kathak style.
<i>Prasad</i>	Divine grace, usually in the form of sweets or food distributed after it has been offered to the deity during <i>puja</i> .
<i>Puja</i>	Ritual worship of Hindu deities.
<i>Puranas</i>	Collections of ancient mythological texts.
<i>Purusha</i>	'Individual' form of absolute consciousness; cosmic man, or God within.
<i>Pushpanjali</i>	A devotional dance offering flowers to the deity which often begins a Bharatanatyam performance; name of a double-hand gesture in dance, meaning 'flower-casket'.
<i>Raas</i>	Folk dance from Gujarat using sticks.
<i>Radha</i>	The consort of the deity Krishna.
<i>Rama</i>	Hero of epic text <i>Ramayana</i> and eldest son of King Dasaratha.

<i>Ramayana</i>	Ancient Sanskrit epic, telling the story of the life of the god Rama, thought to have been composed by the poet Valmiki.
<i>Ranjaniyu</i>	Fast, spontaneous dance variation at end of <i>Garba</i> evening.
<i>Rasa</i>	‘Juice’, ‘essence’ or ‘flavour’ –indicates mood or essence of artistic experience.
<i>Ras Lila</i>	A re-enactment in dance or drama of Krishna’s <i>life</i> stories.
<i>Ratha Yatra</i>	Annual chariot festival when the deity Krishna is brought out from the temple and carried in a decorated wooden chariot.
<i>Ravana</i>	Demon king of the epic story <i>Ramayana</i> who abducted Rama’s wife, Sita and took her to his kingdom on Sri Lanka.
<i>Rigveda</i>	The oldest of the four ancient Vedic hymns that are the scriptural foundation of Hinduism.
<i>SADiB</i>	‘South Asian Dance in Britain’ – title of two-year Leverhulme-funded research undertaken at Roehampton University, London in 2000-2002 and directed by Dr Andrée Grau.
<i>Sadir</i>	Another term for the original Bharatanatyam style.
<i>Saivite</i>	Worship, or worshipper of deity Siva.
<i>Salam</i>	Muslim bow or dedication performed in Kathak dance.
<i>Salwar kamiz</i>	Trousers and loose over-top worn by Indian women.
<i>Samaj</i>	A caste group or religious organisation.
<i>Samaparnam</i>	Offering of dance to the temple after an <i>arangetram</i> .
<i>Samaveda</i>	One of the four ancient Vedic hymns that are the scriptural foundation of Hinduism.
<i>Sampradaya</i>	A ‘handing-on’; description of Guru-led religious organisation.
<i>Sanatan</i>	Unchanging, eternal; now used as a general description of Hinduism, particularly by Hindus.
<i>Sanskritization</i>	Term coined by M.N. Srinivas (1968) to indicate the process of upwardly moving castes.

<i>Sari</i>	Traditional draped women's dress in use all over India.
<i>Satsanga</i>	A religious gathering.
<i>Sattriya</i>	Classical Indian dance from Assam.
<i>Sattva, sattvic</i>	The quality of purity; one of the three <i>gunas</i> .
<i>Shabdam</i>	An interpretive item in a Bharatanatyam performance.
<i>Shakti</i>	Divine female energy or power.
<i>Shastra</i>	Body of ancient Hindu laws.
<i>Shikara</i>	Crest or peak; pinnacle of tower of temple; name of hand gesture indicating these notions in dance.
<i>Shilpaprakasha</i>	A medieval manuscript which sets out rules and regulations for temple building.
<i>Shravana</i>	Hearing, particularly in relation to philosophic or religious teaching.
<i>Shringara rasa</i>	Essence of romantic or erotic love.
<i>Shubha</i>	Auspicious
<i>Shuddha</i>	Ritual purity.
<i>Sita</i>	Wife of hero Rama in epic <i>Ramayana</i> .
<i>Sitar</i>	North Indian plucked, stringed instrument.
<i>Siva</i>	One of main trilogy of Hindu deities.
<i>Sivalinga</i>	Aniconic form of Siva for worship.
<i>Sivaratri, Mahasivaratri</i>	Annual festival to worship Siva.
<i>Skanda</i>	Name of son of Siva, known also as Murugan.
<i>Sri, Shree</i>	Honorific title for male.
<i>Subrahmanya</i>	Name of deity Murugan.
<i>Sundareswara</i>	Name of deity Siva.

<i>Swami</i>	God, or lord; honorific title for <i>guru</i> or god.
<i>Swami step</i>	Simple dance movements performed by ISKCON devotees to the sound of drums and cymbals during religious worship.
<i>Swaminarayan</i>	‘Lord God’; title of leader and of Gujarati religious sect with world-wide following.
<i>Tabla</i>	Pair of upright drums used for classical <i>Kathak</i> dance. Term is used now for both drums, although it is the name of the right-hand drum only; the left is called the <i>banya</i> .
<i>Tai Pusam</i>	Annual Tamil Hindu festival dedicated to Murugan, Lord Siva’s son.
<i>Talam</i>	The rhythmic time-cycles in Indian music.
<i>Tattu-kali</i>	Block of wood and stick to beat the time, used in a Bharatanatyam class.
<i>Tavil</i>	Two-sided south Indian drum used in temple processions.
<i>Ter</i>	Decorated wooden chariot used to carry the deity out of the temple. Name of annual festival during which this happens.
<i>Thaila-apiyangam</i>	Ritual act of applying oil to unsanctified images of deities.
<i>Thiruvilzha, Tiruvila</i>	Annual ‘cleansing’ festival in Tamil temples.
<i>Thurkkai</i>	Name of goddess Durga.
<i>Tillana</i>	Final item of a Bharatanatyam dance concert; a fast, joyous, celebratory dance.
<i>Tirandukuli</i>	‘Bath after menarche’; ceremony for menarche.
<i>Tirtha</i>	Sacred spot, often becoming a site of pilgrimage for Hindus.
<i>Ugadi</i>	Telugu New Year.
<i>Utsava</i>	A feast, or celebration.
<i>Vaisakhi (Baisakhi)</i>	Punjabi New Year, celebrated on April 13 or 14, celebrating the harvesting of the crops and the founding of the Sikh order of <i>Khalsa Panth</i> by Guru Gobind Singh

in 1699.

<i>Vaishaka</i>	Hindu month falling between mid-April to mid-May.
<i>Vaishnava, Vaishnavite</i>	Pertaining to deity Vishnu; worshipper of Vishnu.
<i>Valmiki</i>	Lower caste of Punjabi society.
<i>Varnam</i>	Long, central dance item of a Bharatanatyam performance depicting a song or poetry and interspersed with pure dance.
<i>Vastupurushamandala</i>	Sacred geometrical ground plan of south Indian temple.
<i>Vedas</i>	Sacred scriptures of Hinduism.
<i>Vedic</i>	Pertaining to the <i>Vedas</i> .
<i>Veena</i>	Plucked stringed instrument used in both north and south India.
<i>Vel</i>	Spear and symbol of deity Murugan.
<i>Vellalar</i>	High caste, land-owning Tamil group.
<i>Ventakeswara</i>	A name of deity Vishnu.
<i>Vinayaka</i>	A name of deity Ganapathy alluding to his power to remove obstacles.
<i>Vishnu</i>	One of the triad of main Hindu deities; thought to embody creative power or energy.
<i>Vrata</i>	A religious vow.
<i>Yajurveda</i>	One of the four books of the <i>Veda</i> , dealing with sacrificial procedures.
<i>Yoni</i>	Holder, or receptacle; divine womb.

Appendix 4:

Results of questionnaires given to South Asian dance teachers and dance students

A. Leicester:

1. i, ii: Results of *Navratri* questionnaire given to 8 children at Rushey Mead School, Leicester, aged 13-15, 12.11.02.
2. i, ii, iii: Results of questionnaires given to South Asian dance teachers and performers in Leicester, 15.5.03.
3. i, ii, iii, iv: Results of questionnaires given to South Asian dance students in Leicester, 22.3.03.

B. London:

4. i, ii: Results of questionnaires given to Tamil Bharatanatyam students in London, 12.10.03.

NAME	AGE	VISIT GARBA THIS YEAR?	WHERE?	ATTEND A TEMPLE?	WHICH ONE?	ATTEND GARBA WITH FAMILY?	WITH FRIENDS	EVER OUTSIDE LEICESTER?	WHERE?	DO YOU LEARN DANCE?	WHERE?
Milli Bhojani	15	Yes, 6x	De Montfort Hall, Ramgarhia Hall LohanaSamaj	Yes	Ram Mandir	Yes	Yes	Yes	Nottingham	Yes	Neighbourhood Centre
Urvashi Jadav	15	Yes, 8x	De Montfort, Ramgarhia	Yes	Sanatan Mandir	Yes	Yes	Yes	London	No	-----
Nikki Shah	14	Yes, 5x	Pancholi Samaj (Roundhill College)	Yes	Jain Temple, Shakti Temple	Yes	Yes	Yes	London	Yes	Jain Temple, and in school
Monica Desai	13	Yes, 5x	Ramgarhia, Abbey Primary	No	_____	Yes	Yes	No	_____	No	
Gurpreet	13	No, went last year	Starlight	Yes		Yes	No	No	_____	Yes	At school (Bhangra)
Jay	13	Yes, 5x	Ramgarhia	Yes	Ram Mandir	Yes	Yes	Yes	London	No	_____
Priya Parmar	13	Yes, 10x	Ramgarhia Ram Mandir	Yes	Ram Mandir	Yes	Yes	Yes	Preston	Yes	At home
Nikhil Parukh	13	Yes, 7x	De Montfort Ramgarhia	Yes	Ram Mandir	Yes	Yes	No	_____	No	_____

1.i: Results of Navratri questionnaires given to 8 children at Rushey Mead School, Leicester, aged 13-15: 12.11.02 (part 1)

NAME	DO YOU ATTEND MOST YEARS?	DO YOU PRACTISE DANCE AT HOME?	DO YOU DANCE ANYWHE -RE ELSE?	WHERE?	WHAT IS BEST AT NAVRATRI- The music?	Meeting friends?	Playing Garba?	Playing Raas?	The religious part?	Other?	LANGUA- GES SPOKEN
Milli Bhojani	Yes	Yes, Bharata natyam & learn from films	No	_____	Yes	Yes	Yes	_____	Yes	Meeting old family members	French, bit of Hindi, Gujarati
Urvashi Jadav	Yes, every year	Yes, I learn from films	No	_____	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	_____	_____	French, bit of Hindi, Gujarati
Nikki Shah	Yes	Sometimes	Yes	Once at a wedding	_____	Yes	Yes	Yes	_____	_____	Gujarati
Monica Desai	Yes	Yes	Yes	Weddings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	_____	_____	Gujarati, Hindi, bit of French
Gurpreet	Last year	Yes	No	_____	_____	Yes	Yes	_____	Yes	_____	Punjabi
Jay	Yes	No	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Yes	_____	_____	Gujarati
Priya Parmar	Yes	Yes	No	_____	_____	_____	_____ -	Yes	_____	_____	Gujarati
Nikhil Parukh	Yes	No	_____	_____	Yes	Yes	_____	Yes	_____	_____	Gujarati

1.ii: Results of Navratri questionnaires given to 8 children at Rushey Mead School, Leicester, aged 13-15: 12.11.02 (part 2)

NAME	CURRENT TEACHING	EXAM SYSTEM USED	TERMINOLOGY USED	OTHER DANCE TERMINOLOGY	TRAINING	LENGTH OF TRAINING
Prithi Raihatha	Mons 5.45-6.45pm Bollywood style 6-11ys; Private lessons, eves; Rushey Mead School	None, work is performance based	Indian dance South Asian dance	Filmi; classical; modern; modern Asian; contemporary	Nilima Devi –Kathak; Many other teachers in Leicester.	Folk dance 20years; Kathak 9 years (3 exams); BA (Hon) SA dance; SA teaching Diploma(1 year)
Vaidehi Pancholi	Mon 5-6pm - Filmi 3-6 yrs; Fri 6-7.30pm Bharatanatyam & creative 7+ yrs	Prayag Sangit Samiti	Indian dance	Bollywood; classical; traditional; contemporary	Diploma in Bharatanatyam in Ahmedabad, India from Nritya Bharti Academy	8 years for diploma; also some training in folk dance
Nimisha Parmar	Workshops for 7+; School teaching and group work	None	Indian dance	Filmi; classical; creative; contemporary	Baroda, India at Madhur Jyoti school; teacher Shri Madhubhai Patel	9 years of Bharatanatyam, including BA in dance; also training in folk dance (India)
Nayana Whittaker	Tues and Wed pm 6+ Kathak, filmi, creative and folk; Thurs eve – perf.group Kathak	ISTD Kathak	Indian dance South Asian dance	Bollywood; creative; Kathak; traditional folk; contemporary	Nilima Devi – Kathak; Folk dance in India from many teachers	Diploma in Kathak – 5 years?
Nilima Devi	Mon, Wed 6-9 pm Sat 10-12.30 am 7+	ISTD Kathak	Indian dance South Asian dance	Classical; Kathak; traditional; creative/classical; creative	Jaipur school of Kathak in India – Univ. of Baroda; Pandit Sundarlal Gangam	10 years – Diploma and Masters in dance
Smita Vadnerkar	Fri afternoons and eves 4+; Thurs eves and Sat am 10-2.00 (different groups)	ISTD Bharatanatyam	Indian dance	Bollywood; Bharatanatyam; creative.	Baroda, India with different gurus. Some training here in UK.	Diploma in Bharatanatyam – 5 years?

2.i: Results of questionnaires given to dance teachers and performers in Leicester: 15.5.03 (part 1)

NAME	IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION	GROUP PERFORMANCES	PERSONAL PERFORMANCES	FUNDING	ANY DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING	CHANGES IN TEACHING NEEDED
Prithi Raithatha	Yes, very important. It was what took me into dance	Queen's Jubilee event; Divali festival; <i>Utsava</i> evening; many other local programmes	None for last 3 years	No	Lack of commitment from students; lack of funding; lack of space; lack of support	Yes- no real interest in authentic dance styles. Have to teach filmi dance, and students want fast, instant results.
Vaidehi Pancholi	Yes, traditional dances further knowledge of culture; can be misleading as now dance is not just related to religion.	Belgrave Mela; Divali festival; community events; Belgrave Hall Museum	At Hindu festivals ie. Sivaratri	No, as I have a full-time job	Lack of space for large groups; not enough commitment from students	Yes, I have had to change my style from BN to teach filmi dance; students want quick results and to perform.
Nimisha Parmar	Yes, to me dance is a form of devotion, and I do dance to feel closer to God and nature. We perform religious stories through dance	BBC Live; Haymarket Theatre; Phoenix Theatre; many other occasions	With my group in Leicester; also solo in London and Leicester	No; I work part-time	Lack of funding	Needs hard work to keep classical dance forms; also need way of teaching Bharatanatyam with Gujarati language, as mostly is in Tamil
Nayana Whittaker	Yes, it is important in Indian dance; many dances based on religion	Haymarket Theatre; Phoenix Theatre; Queen's Jubilee event; Kala Sangam (Yorks) etc	With my group	£500 current for choreography; applying for more for productions	No major problems	No, because I teach a wide range of styles
Nilima Devi	Yes, it is very spiritual and a way of expressing Hindu philosophy and culture. I see it as part of education for young people to combine dance, mythology and Bhakti.	Many performances in theatres, community events, festivals etc	Yes, many performances and tours	Yes, for new projects	Lack of space; students not wanting to travel; lack of commitment etc	No, because I continue to teach classical (Kathak), and not filmi style. My own work is developing more cross-culturally so that it reaches a wider audience
Smita Vadnerkar	Very important. Without that, you cannot understand classical dance.	'Jungle Book' at Leicester Haymarket; performances at Leicester Mela, Divali and Navratri festivals	Some with group.	Small amount from Leicester City Council for 'Jungle Book' performances.	Lack of space and lack of funding.	Yes, my way of teaching in UK is very different from India. Here there is no strict relationship between guru & student – you have to be on friendly and familiar terms.

2.ii: Results of questionnaires given to dance teachers and performers in Leicester: 15.5.03 (part 2)

NAME	EVIDENCE OF CASTE DISTINCTION	CASTES NOT DANCING	DOES DANCE CONFIRM CULTURAL IDENTITY	HAVE YOU DANCED IN TEMPLES	VIEWS ON MENSTRUATION	FUTURE PLANS
Prithi Raithatha	Not really; Muslim girls now participate, but not in the past.	Bengali and Marathi communities do, but not Muslim	To a certain extent.	Yes, inside the temple.	Depends on individual suffering; perfectly ok to participate but not vigorously, just modestly.	I believe traditional dances are becoming outdated except for Navratri festival. Unless we keep up with all the new styles, we will be teaching less and less
Vaidehi Pancholi	No Muslim girls	Both Gujarati and Punjabi groups have dance and music; not sure about Muslim community	Yes, if they learn traditional dance, they will learn about their culture at the same time.	Not in the temple, but for religious functions in halls and on stage.	Yes, you can participate. You have to decide about certain movements ie I would not do the devotee dance at that time.	I would like to see more girls learning proper traditional dance rather than filmi style. I would like to emphasise the importance of folk and classical.
Nimisha Parmar	None	-	Yes	No	As long as you are ok physically, you can perform. I think we should be proud of being women and of ability to create new life.	I would like to improve the quality of my dancing, and to help raise the standard of dance in Leicester. We need good professional teachers.
Nayana Whittaker	None	No	Yes	Yes, at local Hindu temple	Has no effect.	To expand my company and keep promoting Asian dance in Leicester.
Nilima Devi	Not really	Most castes do Bollywood dance	Yes, to some extent	Yes, for religious functions at Sanatan Mandir (Sivaratri); Ram Mandir (Divali); and Coventry Temple.	I cannot avoid it, so I teach unless it is painful. For performances, I take painkillers if needed.	
Smita Vadnerkar	Yes, but will not mention it here.	-	Yes, they learn the prayers, stories, music, language through the dance without realising it.	Yes, but in the adjoining hall, in temple in Peterborough. Not so much now, though.	Not at religious functions where the deity is on the stage. Ok for outside performances i.e. Divali	To extend awareness of classical dance, as it is our tradition. To get more boys interested; to develop new work.

2. iii: Results of questionnaires given to dance teachers and performers in Leicester: 15.5.03 (part 3).

NAME	AGE	NO OF YEARS TRAINING	STYLES LEARNT	DANCE TEACHERS IN LEICESTER	ANY OTHER TRAINING – WHERE	WITH WHOM	DANCE EXAMS TAKEN
Kesha	16	10	Kathak, creative, modern, folk	Prithi Raithatha, Nilima Devi, Judy Sealy	London, Birmingham	_____	ISTD Grades 1-3 A level dance
Ashka	12	7	Kathak, Bharatanatyam	Kundan Patel, Nilima Devi	India	Muriben Mohlirk (?)	ISTD Grades 1-4
Krupa	17	7	Kathak, Contemporary	Prithi Raithatha, Kesha Raithatha	_____	_____	None
Dhara	25	10	Kathak	Nilima Devi, Prithi Raithatha	India	Suman Mangeshkar	Yes, ?
Bejal	18	10	Kathak	Nilima Devi	_____	_____	ISTD Grades 1-3
Malvi	15	10	Kathak	Nilima Devi, Nayana Whittaker	_____	_____	ISTD Grades 1-3
Daniel	13	5	Kathak	Nilima Devi	_____	_____	ISTD Grades 1-3
Kavita	19	7	Indian folk	Nimisha Parmar	_____	_____	None
Shruti	14	7	Indian folk and Classical	Nimisha Parmar	_____	_____	Pt. Ram Sahi Sangeet Vidyalaya
Neha	17	?	Classical, Indian folk	Nimisha Parmar, Vaidehi Pancholi	_____	_____	Sangeet Vidya

3.i: Results of questionnaires given to South Asian dance students in Leicester: 22.3.03 (part 1)

NAME	IS DANCE AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR RELIGION OR FAITH	EXPLAIN...	IS DANCE AN INTEGRAL PART OF HINDU RELIGION	WHAT PART DOES IT PLAY	HAVE YOU EVER DANCED IN A TEMPLE	WHICH ONE AND WHAT OCCASION	WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE STYLE- WHY	HAVE YOU EVER PERFORMED IN INDIA
Kesha	Yes, in a way	There are aspects of Kathak expressing and telling stories about God	Yes	_____	Yes	_____	Kathak. I am more comfortable with it	No
Ashka	No	I dance as a hobby	No	Don't know	No	_____	Kathak. It is relaxing and nice to watch	Yes, August 2001
Krupa	Yes	Because it has some movements which represents our God	Yes	Its our tradition	Yes	Ram Mandir, on religious occasions	Kathak, because its classical and most pauses are beautiful	No
Dhara	_____	If we have faith in classical dance it will be easy to learn	Yes	_____	Some times	In India	Facial expression	Yes, with my dance teacher
Bejal	Yes	People dance at festivals such as Navratri and Divali.. Dance moves in Kathak have religious significance	Yes	Dance at festivals to express happiness & joy	Yes	For a festival, two years ago.	Kathak and tap. They are both so alive and interesting to watch. They have a great rhythm.	No
Malvi	Yes	Kathak traditionally expresses stories about our gods. We can show attitudes, feelings and respect. Also, dance is performed at Navratri festival	Yes	It gives us our culture since we dance at festivals etc	Yes	At Navratri	Kathak, Indian folk, filmi. They're all different and have beauty in their own way.	Yes, I performed solo in Gujarat for a wedding.
Daniel	No	I am not Hindu	_____	_____	No	_____	Kathak, because I think it's fun to perform	No
Kavita	No	_____	No	A tradition. It is linked to cultural history that is inextricably linked to religion, despite India being a secular state	No	_____	Bharatanatyam	No
Shruti	Yes	_____	Yes	_____	No	_____	Folk, as it's more creative and more different to other styles	No
Neha	Yes	The dance style is part of who I am –my roots, culture, belief	_____	_____	_____	_____	Folk	No

3.ii: Results of questionnaires given to South Asian dance students in Leicester: 22.3.03 (part 2)

NAME	AGE	NO OF YEARS TRAINING	STYLES LEARNT	DANCE TEACHERS IN LEICESTER	ANY OTHER TRAINING-WHERE	WITH WHOM	DANCE EXAMS TAKEN
Urvi	17	7	Bharatanatyam, Indian folk, Contemporary	Vaidehi Pancholi Nimisha Parmar	_____	_____	Sangeet Vidya 1-3
Leena	16	7	Bharatanatyam Indian folk, Contemporary	Nimisha Parmar	_____	_____	Sangeet Vidya
Shreya	16	7	Bharatanatyam, Indian folk Contemporary	Nimisha Parmar	_____	_____	Sangeet Vidya
Gangotri	13	1	Kathak Indian folk	Nimisha Parmar Urvi Walia	_____	_____	None
Anjaree	16	5 months	Bharatanatyam, Indian folk	Vaidehi Pancholi	south India	At school	None
Rekha	15	3	Bharatanatyam, Indian folk	Kundan Patel Vaidehi Pancholi			Junior Diploma, level 1
Bhavini	15	4	Bharatanatyam, Indian folk	Kundan Patel Vaidehi Pancholi	London	?	Junior Diploma
Seema	12	4	Bharatanatyam	Kundan Patel Vaidehi Pancholi	_____	_____	Junior Diploma, level 1
Beena	12	4	Bharatanatyam	Kundan Patel Vaidehi Pancholi	_____	_____	Junior Diploma
Jay	24	6 months	Bharatanatyam	Vaidehi Pancholi	_____	_____	None
Meena	15	4	?	Kundan Patel Vaidehi Pancholi	_____	_____	Junior Diploma, level 1

3.iii: Results of questionnaires given to South Asian dance students in Leicester: 22.3.03 (part 3)

NAME	IS DANCE AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR RELIGION OR FAITH	EXPLAIN...	IS DANCE AN INTEGRAL PART OF HINDU RELIGION	WHAT PART DOES IT PLAY	HAVE YOU EVER DANCED IN A TEMPLE	WHICH ONE AND WHAT OCCASION	WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE STYLE – WHY	HAVE YOU EVER PERFORMED IN INDIA
Urvi	Yes	Depends on the style of dance – different dances represent different cultures	Yes	_____	No	_____	Classical	No
Leena	Yes	When Navratri festival comes, we do a lot of dancing	Yes	_____	Yes	At Navratri	_____	No
Shreya	Yes	Storytelling; understanding of the way of life in the past	Yes	Festivals such as Navratri	Yes	At Navratri	Contemporary	_____
Gangotri	Yes, of faith	Dance is whatever you want it to be associated with	Yes	Part of Navratri	Yes	Every year at Navratri	Disco –it's upbeat and good to dance to	No
Anjaree	Yes, of both	A devotional dance used to express feelings and emotions	Yes	Through dance we pray	Yes	Ram Mandir	Bharatanatyam, filmi dance. They express body language	Yes, in my boarding school
Rekha	Yes, of faith	Even though Bharatanatyam is a devotional dance for Lord Siva, I am not extremely religious and I perform dance as part of what I believe in.	Yes	People can pray through dance	No	_____	Filmi dance. It is one dance style within which you can incorporate many others.	No
Bhavini	Yes, of faith	BN is a devotional dance to Siva; I am not that religious so I perform dance as my hobby and faith from inside my heart.	Yes	People say a lot through dance and pray.	Yes	Sanatan Mandir	Folk and filmi dance, because it uses everything	No
Seema	Yes, of faith	BN is a devotional dance to Lord Siva	Yes	It is my hobby	Yes	Sanatan Mandir	Folk and filmi dance, because it comes in everything	No
Beena	Yes, of faith	“ “ “ “	Yes	“ “ “	No	_____	Folk, because it is exciting and you can do any moves	No
Jay	No	It's not exactly anything to do with faith or religion, because it's not part of your religion to learn it. I do it because I love to dance ever since I was young	No	_____	No	_____	Classical and filmi dances; classical as it's traditional and film because there's more variety and different music	No
Meena	No	It is nothing to do with religion	No	_____	Yes	Two years ago	Bharatanatyam, because it is a creative dance	No

3.iv: Results of questionnaires given to South Asian dance students in Leicester: 22.3.03 (part 4)

NAME	AGE	YEARS LEARN-ING	TEACHER	ANY OTHER TRAINING	WHERE	EXAMS TAKEN	FAVOURITE DANCE STYLE	WHY	IS DANCE AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR FAITH	EXPLAIN
Arani	16	7	Pathmini Gunaseelan	Yes	Sri Lanka	Grades 1-5	-	-	Yes	It is the dance of Lord Siva
Sophie	16	6	As above	Yes	India, Chennai	Grades 1-5	Bharata – natyam	It helps me understand the culture.	Yes	Dance items tell religious stories and praise the Hindu gods. Lord Natarajah is the God of dance and I feel I receive his blessing.
Reena	17	7	As above	No	-	Grades 1-5	-	-	Yes	Most of the dances are about Gods and Goddesses.
Meera	12	5-6	As above and Ananthirani Balenthara	No	-	Grades 1-4	Bollywood	I like the music.	Yes	-
Bhanumanjari	12	7	P.Gunaseelan	No	-	Grades 1-5	-	-	It expresses the religion	Most of the Gods and Goddesses are involved.
Mithula	13	7	As above	No	-	Grades 1-5	Bharata – natyam	It is very beautiful and exciting.	Yes	It is Lord Natarajah's symbol.
Geetha	13	4	As above	No	-	Grades 1-3	Bharata – natyam	I'm inspired by watching others and it's extremely interesting.	Yes	I think this is because it's not compulsory for religion but is part of my culture.
Priya	15	4	As above	No	-	Grades 1-3	Bollywood	I like the music and the dance.	Yes	-
Abitha	10	5	As above	No	-	Grades 1-4	Bharatanaty-am	I like the dance.	Yes	Because you're dancing about the gods.
Aparna	12	5	As above	No	-	Grades 1-5	Bollywood dance	I like the beat.	Yes	-
Sahaana	13	5	As above	Yes	India, Chennai	Grades 1-4	Bharatan- atyam	Because there is always something new to do. Its exciting and the songs are good. It helps me learn more about religion.	Yes	It is part of my faith as it has prayers to God. It tells a story of our God (Lord Natarajah).

4.i: Results of questionnaires given to Tamil Bharatanatyam students in London: 12.10.03 (part 1)

NAME	IS DANCE PART OF HINDU RELIGION	WHAT PART DOES IT PLAY	HAVE YOU DANCED IN A TEMPLE	WHERE, AND WHEN	WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT NAVRATRI
Arani	No	-	Yes	Murugan Temple, East Ham	Playing Garba
Sophie	Yes	It teaches you and the audience about the gods of Hindu religion and prevents the culture and religion being forgotten, especially in the west	Yes	As above	All the people coming together, performing and watching others performing.
Reena	No	-	Yes	As above	Performing
Meera	Yes	It teaches about the god	Yes	As above	Everything
Bhanumanjari	No	-	Yes	As above, for Navratri	Fasting
Mithula	Yes	It tells us about the gods and their stories	Yes	As above	Meeting up with friends and family and watching the cultural programmes
Geeta	Yes	It tells stories about the lives of Krishna, Ganesha, Lord Siva etc	Yes	As above at Navratri	I love performing and watching others show their talent.
Priya	Yes	It teaches about God	Yes	As above	When the teacher gives us the blessing in the temple.
Abitha	Yes	-	Yes	As above	-
Aparna	Yes	It teaches us about God	Yes	As above	Everything
Sahanna	Yes	It teaches you about the Gods and helps you get an idea of what they are like.	Yes	Murugan Temple and Walthamstow Temple	I like going to the temple and watching all the programmes and pujas, and getting together with family and friends.

4.ii: Results of questionnaires given to Tamil Bharatanatyam students in London: 12.10.03 (part 2)

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